

THE LONDON READER

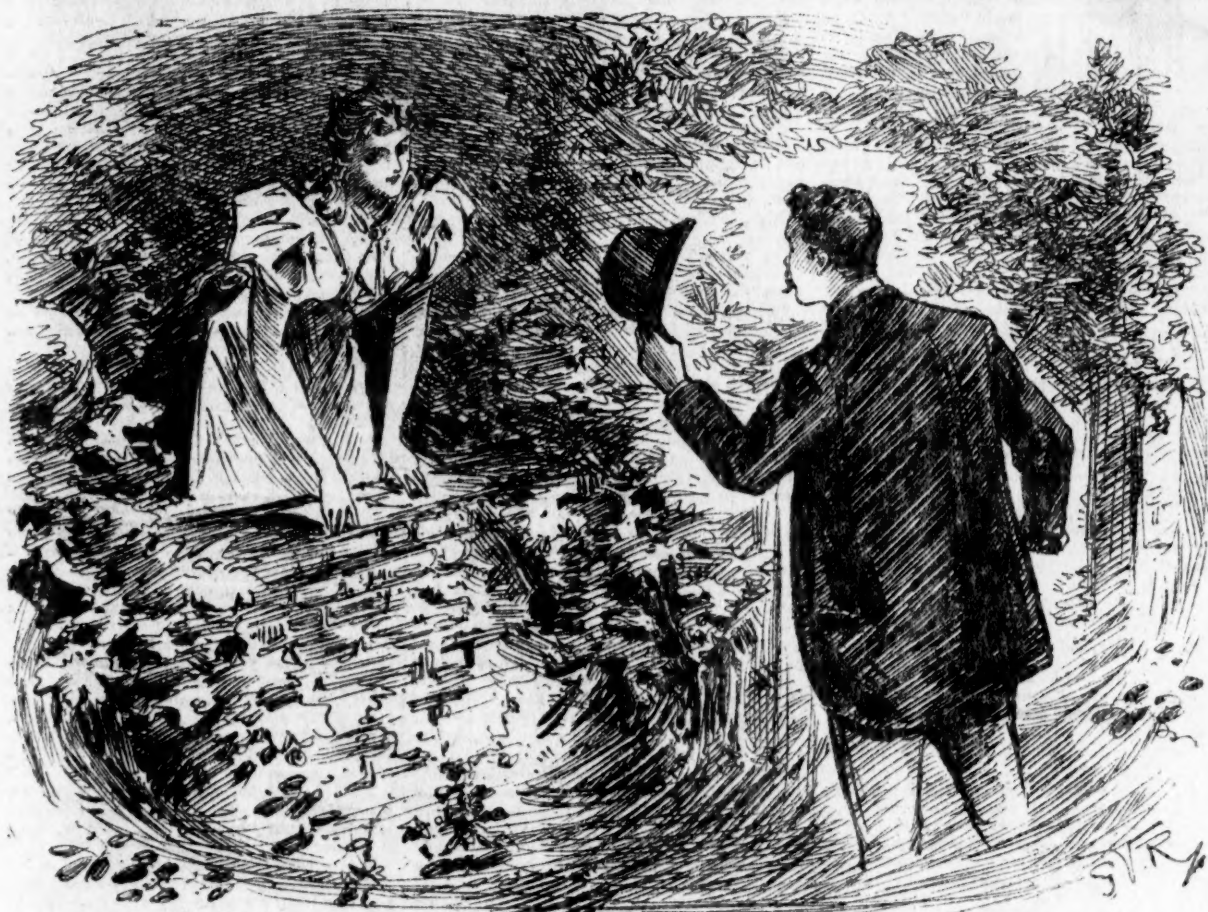
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"MISS MORTIMER," HOWARD SAID, "WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN HIDING?"

MRS. MORTIMER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

MARJORY MORTIMER, walking in leisurely fashion with Roslyn Howard at the grand fête given in honour of Lord Dursingham's coming of age, was suddenly confronted by her father. One glance at his white, wrathful face made her heart leap with fear: she knew that she had seriously offended him, although she could not imagine how or why. Roslyn, who was unacquainted with him personally, waited an instant, expecting she would bring about an introduction, but before she could speak Mr. Mortimer harshly bade her join him and, wholly ignoring her companion, drew her away.

The young fellow looked after him a moment in some perplexity. He could really see no reason why he should object to his escort for Marjory; he was of equal standing with the Mortimers, although perhaps possessed of smaller fortune;

he bore an unblemished name, was not ill-looking, and naturally was annoyed by Mr. Mortimer's conduct; but remembering how exclusive Langbridge people were, and that he and his "folk" had settled in the town only four years ago, he laughed to himself, thinking,—

"Evidently the old man regards me with suspicion; everybody who is not born within the precincts of this blessed town is voted a foreigner. But I am sorry for the little girl," and he turned away to mix with the crowd, whilst Marjory braced herself to meet the ordeal before her.

"What do you mean me to understand by your conduct?" demanded her father within hearing of all those around. She lifted her blue eyes in all their innocence to him, answering nervously,—

"I—I don't think I quite comprehend."

"Then I will speak plainly. Who is that fellow, and why did you purposely evade me to walk with him?"

Little shafts of light gave added beauty to her eyes; the indignant flush upon her cheeks spoke for her, even before she found voice to answer,—

"That gentleman, father, is Mr. Howard, and I

was introduced to him at the Vicarage last week. I have not seen him since until now."

"When you probably met by appointment," he growled.

"No, father. I did not even guess you intended bringing me here; now I wish you had left me at home with auntie—you know I did not care to come—and—and—oh! it is unjust, unkind, to talk to me thus, and to make me the centre of observation."

"That will do!" he interrupted sharply. "When I left you to inspect the azaleas, with Crampton, I bade you wait for me outside the tent. Why did you not obey me?"

"I waited quite twenty minutes, and it was so horrid there by myself, people looked at me so curiously. Then Mr. Howard joined me, and said he would take care of me until you came out. We walked round and round the tents, always returning to the given point."

"I do not believe you; and once for all, Marjory, let me tell you I will not have you walking with boys or men; you are a mere child!"

"I am seventeen," interrupted the girl, still in a hurt tone; "and as for entertaining any

special regard for Mr. Howard, or indeed anybody, I do not, and you should not doubt my word. I would not lie to you!"

"This is not the place in which to discuss such matters. I shall have more to say to you to-morrow; meanwhile you will return home at once. I will take you to the gates—you can travel the rest of the way by yourself, and I hope your aunt will see fit to punish you."

Not another word did Marjory Mortimer utter, but she set her lips fast to keep back the sobs which would rise from her heart, and when reaching the gates her father bade her curtly to hasten home, she still did not break silence. It was not dark yet, being early August, so that she dared not give vent to her sorrow in tears lest she should meet acquaintances by the way. But her heart was throbbing with indignation; she felt crushed with shame and a sense of mortification. What must Roslyn Howard think of her?—she was certain her father's words had reached him—and why should she, who was quite seventeen, be treated as a child? She certainly looked no more, with her innocent face, frank eyes, and long falling hair. Then, too, her dress though dainty, was extremely girlish—scarcely reaching to her ankles—but if she looked a child to-night a woman's heart beat within her breast. Making all possible haste she quickly reached the house, and hurrying into Mrs. Comyn's presence broke into a flood of tears, crying—

"Oh, auntie! oh, auntie! it has all been so shameful, and so horrid."

"Take time, Marjory; I know nothing yet, and this violent weeping will exhaust you."

The voice was low and gentle, according well with the speaker's face and *deux ensemble*; for Mrs. Comyn was rather tall and willowy, with a sweet face, mild brown eyes, and a wealth of prematurely snowy hair, half-occulted by the widow's cap which crowned it. With many sobs and pauses Marjory told her story; at its conclusion Mrs. Comyn remarked—

"Your father is very foolish, and I shall show him this! but when his temper is spent he will be sorry, and we will try to forgive him, Marjory. And in the meanwhile, dear, you must go to bed."

The girl was not loth to obey; she felt that in the privacy of her own room she could best recover her lost composure; and when she had gone the woman, who had been mother and aunt in one to her since her earliest recollection, sat thinking very deeply.

It was no mean task she was setting herself, for Mr. Mortimer, in a passion, was perhaps the most unreasonable and provoking of men, as his sister had cause to know. It was only due to her tact that the little household existed for any length of time in peace, its master's temper not only being violent, but erratic.

It was nearly eleven when he returned, and, after a quick glance round the dainty room, demanded—

"Where is Marjory?"

"Gone to bed, the poor child was quite ill."

"Ill!" interrupted her brother fiercely, "she was out of temper. Did she tell you why she was sent home in disgrace? Ah, I see she did, and now, Alison, understand this, I will not allow her to have any male acquaintances for years to come; she is a child."

"Nonsense, Roger; your wife was only a year older when you were married, and I must tell you plainly you are making a great mistake in treating Marjory in this fashion. She has done no harm; I don't believe she has any thought of love or lovers, but you are doing your best to irritate them in her mind."

"I don't care what you say, I will be master in my own house, and I will not have any boys phandering round. When Marjory is twenty-one it will be time enough for her to think of suitors. This Howard, now, what is the boy?"

"In the first place he is not a boy, being twenty-two; in the second, you are perfectly aware that he is the most promising young clerk in Morley and Throssell's bank, the senior partner is bent on giving him rapid promotion; then it is ridiculous altogether to suppose Marjory and he think of each other with any warmth; they have met but once before, and certainly, if Mr. Roslyn Howard

were an unfit associate for her, the Vicar would not have introduced them."

"You are going to tell me next he is a goody-goody young man. I should not be surprised if you add he is also a Sunday-school teacher; those sort of fellows are always the worst."

"Well you ought to know," answered Mrs. Comyn, sarcastically, "you once were one yourself; the colour had mounted to her faded cheeks, and her eyes had grown bright. "Roger, at the risk of offending you, I must say that you are both unjust and unreasonable; that you are doing your best to spoil a candid nature, to make our frank, truthful Marjory deceitful, and I never will uphold you in such a course. Then, too, you were very much to blame in leaving her alone and unprotected at such an affair; I am extremely obliged to Mr. Howard that he undertook the duty you neglected."

She did not often speak in such a manner, for she loved peace as most women do; but she also hated injustice, and Marjory's trouble was her own.

Now, looking darkly at her, Roger Mortimer said—

"I was a fool to expect support from you; I had forgotten that in your youth you were a thorough-paced flirt."

She laughed with almost youthful recklessness.

"Your imagination sometimes leads you astray, and your courtesy is not unfeeling; but we will not quarrel, Roger, so good-night, and remember to be kind to Marjory in the morning."

He was furious; perhaps there was some jealousy at the root of his anger, for it seemed almost monstrous to him that Marjory should love any but himself and Mrs. Comyn, so the next morning, when the child appeared at breakfast, he resumed his attacks upon her, to the anger of her aunt, and her own most bitter distress. Thus he continued for several days until life was burdensome to the daughter he really loved in his own queer fashion; and a weary thing to Alison Comyn. Then followed a soothing interval; Marjory, revelling in it, forgot all his harshness, all his bitter words, and responded to his kindness with affection; the pale cheeks regained their wonted colour, the blue eyes their brightness, so that one evening when Roslyn Howard saw her leaning over the low wall which bounded the garden, he thought her prettier than ever. The mere fact that he was not allowed to approach her made him the more eager to do so, and with a bow and a smile he advanced. She looked distinctly startled, and the nervous way in which she glanced behind her told it's own tale. But young Howard was not easily daunted.

"Miss Mortimer," he said, "where have you been hiding? I have not seen you since the gala."

In an instant her cheeks had thrown out signals of distress, the memory of the night was still very bitter and shameful to her.

"I wish I had not gone," she said, in a troubled way. "I did not enjoy it, and father was very angry because he could not find me easily."

"He was more than angry when he saw who was your companion," the young man said boldly, "but why? Surely it should not vex him, that another was more thoughtful of your comfort and safety than he; it was not a nice thing to leave such a—a (he was going to say pretty, but changed it to young), young girl as you alone."

CHAPTER II.

"I THINK," said Marjory, hesitatingly, "father did not regard it in that light, because no one is more careful of me than he; and—and forgive me, I am afraid he was annoyed. Good-night, Mr. Howard."

"Oh, don't go in yet, it is quite light and very early;" then, going a little nearer, "I hope he was not angry with you for what was partly his fault, partly mine; oh, I am so sorry," as her tell-tale blushes answered him; "but I do think it a shame you should suffer."

"Will you please to leave me!" begged Marjory, "and do not trouble about me; father is

very good to me; only—only he gets vexed so easily."

"Marjory, you must introduce me to your friend," said a soft voice close by; and there was Mrs. Comyn smiling graciously down at the young man; "remember I have yet to thank him for his care of you!" And the ceremony being performed satisfactorily, she added, "I have always felt I should like to know you and your people, Mr. Howard, but have scarcely ventured to make your acquaintance. You must be aware how exclusive Langbridge folks are, and I was afraid that you might be tainted with the same fault, or folly, which you will."

Roslyn laughed.

"Oh no, we are very sociable, and I am sure my mother and the girls would be delighted if you called on them. Then, too, you will forgive me for saying so much, I really think a little society would be good for Miss Mortimer."

"Oh, Marjory is quite happy with us, and her father has rather peculiar, and very strict ideas concerning the training of young girls. I do not say I share them," with a pretty smile, "but then I am not my niece's guardian; only I will give your suggestion consideration, and if Mr. Mortimer will listen to my charming, will charm him into giving this little more liberty."

She laid her hand with a loving gesture on Marjory's shoulder, for between these two there was perfect love and confidence.

Roslyn looked from one to the other with growing admiration, in his heart determining to win the aunt's favour for the sake of cultivating the niece.

But he would not act rashly; so he fell to admiring Mrs. Comyn's piqueness, and offering to give her some cuttings of a very choice description at the proper season.

She gladly accepted, being a thorough lover of flowers, and after some inconsequent chatter Roslyn took his leave. Then Mrs. Comyn said—

"Marjory, I am dreadfully wicked to thwart your father, and you must not take advantage of my weakness; but I cannot bear to see you treated with injustice, and I wanted to know Mr. Howard; his appearance is so pleasant. Only, Marjory, if your father forbids any intercourse between us and his family, we must submit with grace, although I confess that even I am a little weary of the ultra-quiet life we lead, and it is not always wise to humour a man's fads. Now, let us go indoors, and I will take the blame of the interview upon myself."

This she did, and, according to his nature, Roger Mortimer stormed awhile, protesting that Marjory should "have nothing to do with the Howards."

But Alison Comyn held her own, and as her brother was really attached to her, he finally gave a most reluctant consent for her to receive and return the calls of Mrs. and the Misses Howard, adding, "But I draw a line at that impertinent boy; I will not have him admitted into the house."

"Very well," answered his sister; "but you cannot expect me to behave with discourtesy to him. Really, Roger, your notions are most obsolete and preposterous; if Marjory were a Princess of Royal blood you could not exercise greater surveillance than you do now."

So it came about that some slight intercourse passed between the people of Farndale and Lyne-wood, and although Roslyn was not allowed to enter the sacred portals of the latter, he found plenty of opportunities to cultivate Marjory's acquaintance.

Mr. Mortimer never attended church; it was not hard therefore to overtake aunt and niece, to walk with them on the homeward way; and as he grew more familiar with their habits, he would time his daily exercise to accord with theirs. Long before they guessed it, he and Marjory had fallen deeply and desperately in love, and Mrs. Comyn began to tremble at the thought of her brother's displeasure.

She had really begun this friendship with a view of giving him a salutary lesson, and now with something like fear she realised that she had compassed the very end she least desired to reach.

Still being a wise woman she said nothing to

Marjory, hoping no very great harm had been done; that the young people would forget their mutual "fancy," and all be well.

Then the sudden and alarming illness of Mr. Mortimer drove all other thoughts from her mind; together she and Marjory tended him, and it must be admitted that he was a "beautiful patient," giving very little trouble, and displaying a childlike meekness which was as surprising as it was novel.

On his recovery he was ordered to Hastings, and thither he went, saying it was not necessary for sister or daughter to accompany him.

It would only swell expenses, and he was not a rich man, so they remained contentedly behind.

At first his letters were almost as frequent as the meetings with Roslyn, but at the close of a fortnight, he wrote—"I am getting quite robust, and live so much in the open, that I have less time for correspondence than before, so you will excuse the brevity of this. I am now going out for a pleasant drive with a delightful party—the most delightful of all being a Mr. and Mrs. Gaveston. I shall probably bring them to Langbridge on my return."

"Gaveston! Gaveston!" mused Mrs. Comyn, "I don't know the name; but I am glad Roger is so pleased with their society, and she dismissed the matter from her mind.

Only when her brother's subsequent letters were so full of the Gavestons, she began to grow nervous; they were evidently acquiring such influence over him, and yet, why should she fear when this woman, of whom he spoke so highly was already appropriated?

He had promised to return in a fortnight, he had been absent now six weeks; the harvest was gathered in—when he went away the corn was standing—now the fields were bare, and the short days testified to the lateness of the season.

Marjory and Mrs. Comyn were sitting at breakfast one morning when a batch of letters was brought in, and the elder lady, selecting one, said,—

"From your father, my dear; I will read it first of all; it is probably to announce his return. We must have a little festival on the occasion."

A minute later she gave such a loud cry that Marjory, who was looking through a magazine, glanced up in startled fashion.

"What is it, auntie? Why do you look so scared?"

"Read it, child, I cannot break the news; I cannot finish it," and thrusting the letter into the girl's hands, she waited for her to begin.

"MY DEAR SISTER,

"I am afraid you will be not only surprised, but a trifle vexed at first by the news I have to impart; still a man has a right to please himself, and in such a case as this it is for none to interfere. Briefly, I was married this morning by special licence to Mrs. Gaveston, and after a fortnight's trip to Scotland, intend to return with my bride and her step-son to Langbridge. I trust that this will make no difference either to you or Marjory; my wife wishes me to say that she shall only be too glad for you to remain with us. Break the news to Marjory, and please excuse all brevity, as I am in great haste.

"Your affectionate brother,

"ROGER MORTIMER."

Each looked at the other in stupefied despair; then Marjory being the younger and more impulsive, naturally spoke first.

"It is abominable; oh, auntie, as if he could not be content with you and me! Let us go away before her coming. She must be a horrid woman to marry in such haste. I won't live with her."

"Hush," interrupted her aunt, "I am afraid, Marjory, that you must; and after all, dear, she may be very nice; we must not prejudice her, and, as your father says, he has a perfect right to please himself—only—I remember your mother's home-coming, her sweet and tender ways, and Marjorie, you will not belong to me any more," then to her niece's dismay she began to sob bitterly.

It was hard to be ousted from the place she had so long and tenderly filled; to know that Marjory must acknowledge another's sway; that she must be a mere cypher in the little kingdom she had ruled so well and wisely.

They were sad and heavy days which followed; full of unrest and care; Mrs. Comyns neither visited nor received, excusing herself on the plea that she was too busy preparing for the bride's reception; and Marjory was left much to her own resources.

In the past few weeks she had matured wonderfully both in manner and appearance; love lent her a sweet and gentle dignity which accorded well with the innocence of her fair face, and truthful eyes.

It was the evening prior to her father's return, that, walking leisurely homeward, she was overtaken by Roslyn.

He looked flushed and eager; the thought being with him that now Mr. Mortimer had taken a wife to himself, he would have less need of Marjory, and with all his heart the young man yearned for her.

"Do not make such haste," he expostulated.

"To-morrow the new Mrs. Mortimer will monopolise you; but to-night is yours and mine. Marjory darling, I must speak; I must tell you how dear you have become to me; and I am bold enough to think you are not quite indifferent to me—is it so, Marjory, Marjory?"

The clear true eyes met his a moment, then the tears rose to them whilst her colour came and went fitfully.

"I do love you, Roslyn; but—but—my father!"

"Has relearned love's lore," with a smile, "and he can spare you better now; will not you tell me I may go to him, and ask him for you—your heart pleads for me, Mrs. Comyn is on my side, and I—oh, Marjory, every day increases my love."

"I pray that father will hear you—and—and grant your wish," was all she said, but was not that enough? Apparently it was; for taking her in his arms Roslyn kissed the sweet mouth, the cool soft cheek, thanking Heaven for this blessed gift.

A little later Marjory stole into the house; her aunt heard her hesitating steps and went to meet her. When she saw the glory in her eyes, on her young face, she guessed the truth, and taking her in her arms, said,—

"Heaven be good to you my beloved."

CHAPTER III.

On the morrow Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer, accompanied by Linley Gaveston returned to Langbridge. All along Marjory had pictured her new mother as fair, florid, and of majestic proportions; instead of which she proved to be a frail-looking American of some forty years, with brown hair, and long-lashed grey eyes; she was small of stature, had little clinging ways, although those who best knew her avowed that these were assumed; one of her countrywomen had been heard to say,—

"She is a little cat, but she knows how to sheathe her claws when it suits her purpose."

However this might be—and the best of us have enemies—she met Marjory quite affectionately; and to Mrs. Comyn she said, with a deprecatory smile.

"I am afraid that you must regard me as a usurper; but I hope soon to overcome your prejudice and really I am not a difficult person to live with; am I Linley?" turning to a tall, "scrappy," young man in the rear.

He muttered some response, and advancing awkwardly was introduced as,—

"My stepson, Linley Gaveston," Mrs. Mortimer, adding, "It seems absurd for such a big fellow to call me mother, does it not—there are only thirteen years between us, Linley is twenty-seven, but no son ever gave his mother greater affection, deeper respect than he gives me. Marjory, I hope you will be good friends as your dear father has consented to receive him permanently into the household. Now, dear, take

me to my room; I must get well acquainted with you."

She ignored Mrs. Comyn then, as linking her hand in the girl's arm she turned towards the staircase, laughing and chatting all the while.

"If you follow them," said Mrs. Comyn, "Marjory will point out your room to you, Mr. Gaveston; I hope you will find everything to your satisfaction," then as he obeyed, brother and sister were once more alone, face to face.

"Well," said Mr. Mortimer, sheepishly, "I suppose you are angry with me, Alison; but even you will acknowledge that Lillias is a good excuse for my seeming folly."

"But not for your deceit," she answered, passionately. "I consider you have behaved abominably both to Marjory and myself, at least you owed it to us to acquaint us with your projected marriage, before it became an absolute fact. I could then have made some arrangements for the future, and Marjory would not have been subjected to such pain."

"Marjory has nothing to do with it; I pleased myself, and I think, Alison, you are taking a very high hand. By the way, what have you done with the child? She looks two or three years older than when I left, has turned up her hair, wears long dresses and altogether is changed. I don't like it, Alison, and I shall see that my wife makes some alteration."

"Your wife!" speaking still with unaccustomed passion, "have I not been Marjory's mother ever since her own mother died? Will you rob me even of her when you do not need her yourself. Already Roger, Mrs. Mortimer has dethroned me, do not let her usurp your child's place in your heart."

"Oh," said a voice from above, "do not quarrel about me I beg; I want to make not war peace; Sister Alison, when you understand me you will not be so vexed with me," and rustling downstairs the bride clasped her little hands about her sister-in-law's arm. "I did wrong," she purred, "to enter the family in such an unceremonious fashion, but when one is in love, one is generally selfish, and I must plead guilty to that indictment—still, the sin is not unforgivable, and reaching up she kissed the other's averted cheek. "I am not such a very bad little woman at the bottom," she added, with a smile at her husband who sat frowning by, "and I promise not to steal Marjory from you, although I do hope she will give me a corner in her heart."

"Deal justly by her and all may yet be well," was Mrs. Comyn's uncompromising answer, and then still with the little woman beside her, she went into the dining-room, wondering heavily how matters would end.

The pretty, silken-robed, suave-voiced bride did not impress her favourably; it might be prejudice of course, but she distrusted her, and feared for the future of the child she so dearly loved.

Presently Marjory came down, then Linley Gaveston followed, but the meal was by no means cheerful, the conversation being almost wholly confined to Mrs. Mortimer, for her stepson contributed nothing to it, never removing his eyes from his plate, save to look at Marjory in a manner that was almost offensive.

He was an extremely plain young man, with pale gray eyes, straw-coloured hair, and a mere wisp of a moustache scarcely deeper in hue than his sallow cheeks; he did not even seem amiable, but Mr. Mortimer paid him greatest deference, a fact which astonished his sister until she learned that he was almost a millionaire.

It was Mrs. Mortimer herself who apprised her of this fact, as they chatted together the following morning.

"My dear Alison," she said, "I am by no means a rich woman; my first marriage was one of coercion, and I did not live happily with my husband. In a fit of passion he willed almost the whole of his property to Linley, but in his last moments he would have given worlds to undo his injustice, only it was then too late. Still, I have enough for my wants, and I love Linley far too well to grudge him his good fortune."

And listening, Mrs. Comyn thought,—

"I must be wrong in my estimate of her," and

tried her utmost to banish any lurking dislike or suspicion from her mind.

If she could have seen the deceased man's last testament, she would have been considerably enlightened as to the true state of affairs. One clause in it ran thus,—

"To my wife Lillias Gaveston I leave my curse, for she has made earth a hell to me, and death will be welcome because it rids me of the falsest, cruellest woman who ever befooled a man into marriage."

Everything had gone to his son by his former wife—a weak and vicious young man who had just craft enough to hide his vices from his father's knowledge. He was completely under his stepmother's control, though he himself did not suspect this, so cunning was she; and out of his abundance he provided for her needs, but she, being haunted by a fear of evil befalling him, had resolved to marry Roger Mortimer, saying to herself,—

"He is not rich, but he can keep me in comfort; should Linley pre-decease me, I should have nothing," for by his father's will if he died leaving no heirs the property reverted to a distant cousin.

So being wise in her generation Lillias Gaveston thought that half a loaf was better than none, and thus it was she came to Langbridge, stipulating that Linley should accompany her.

He could leave her nothing, but he could give her much, and she was altogether unwilling to lose any good thing.

Then, too, if he were left to his own devices, might he not fall a prey to some designing girl? for he was not only physically but mentally weak.

"Unless he will marry a woman as pliant to my touch as himself," thought Lillias, "he shall not marry at all."

And this was the woman Roger Mortimer had put in his dead wife's stead. Mrs. Comyn had, of course, yielded up the keys to her, and in no way disputed her authority, but she felt the change in her position cruelly, and would have gone away, only there was Marjory to be thought of.

If only she could see her Roslyn's wife she would be at rest; and she waited impatiently for his return from town whither he had been despatched on important business.

She was not much afraid now of her brother's answer; he had other interests, other affections, but she certainly felt disturbed when Linley Gaveston displayed a marked preference for Marjory's society, and an ever-increasing admiration of her beauty.

However, at the close of a week Roslyn appeared upon the scene, and having transacted his business with his employers at once went to Lyndewood.

Mr. Mortimer started angrily when he took his card, saying,—

"Now what on earth can the young cub want with me?" and Mrs. Comyn replied quietly,—

"As Marjory is not here I will answer for her; he has come to ask for her hand. He is in every way a suitable partner for her—"

"So that is the way the wind blows; in my absence you have permitted and encouraged an attachment to which I most strongly object. It is high time I gave her a wiser guardian; in future I shall not trust her to your care; as for young Howard I shall soon send him packing," and he rushed violently from the room.

"Who is this Mr. Howard?" questioned Lillias, "and does he really want to steal our Marjory?"

"He is a handsome young fellow—clerk at the bank."

"Only clerk! Oh, dear, I am afraid that would not do for the child; men in that grade of life rarely have large incomes—rather the reverse. You do not wish me to understand, Alison, that dear Marjory's affections are centred upon him?"

"There is not the slightest doubt of it," said Mrs. Comyn, bluntly, as, burning with indignation, still smarting under her brother's cruel words, she left her sister-in-law, knowing only too well that Roslyn would find no advocate in her.

Very frankly and modestly the young man pleaded his cause, urging, that although not rich, he had sufficient to give Marjory a comfortable

home, and it would be his life-long endeavour to make her happy. Mr. Mortimer, against his will, was touched by his earnest manner, his eager, half-boyish pleading, and although he had been prepared to send him away brusquely, found himself quite unable to do so; especially when Roslyn pleaded,—

"You are so happy yourself, sir, you surely would not wilfully make others wretched."

A moment he stood in thought, then he said, "Marjory is very young, and I had other views for her, but I am not a hard man, so will give this matter my consideration. In the meanwhile you will not attempt to communicate with my child; at the close of the week you shall have my reply," and seeing how useless it was to combat his resolution, Roslyn submitted with what grace he could.

When he was gone, Mr. Mortimer sought his wife. "Lillias," he said, "you shall decide for me: shall I give Marjory to young Howard or no? He wants no settlements with her; indeed, now that I have you to think of, my darling, I can make none. Shall it be 'yes,' or 'no'?"

"It is a matter which calls for gravest thought," she answered, demurely. "When is Mr. Howard to receive your reply?"

"A week from to-night."

"Then give me until to-morrow, and I will weigh all the pros and cons. It is our duty, Roger, to do our very best for the dear child."

"I am sure you feel it so; you are an angel, my Lillias, because, as yet, Marjory has given you neither love nor duty—only frigid courtesy."

CHAPTER IV.

"LINLEY," said Mrs. Mortimer as they walked together in the pleasant garden, "I have a question to ask you."

"Fire away, I'm all attention," he answered, biting at the straw between his teeth. "What is up? and do you want more cash?"

"Not at present; but what I do want, is to know if your attentions to Marjory mean anything. Do you wish to marry her?"

"I'm not particular," yawning; then suddenly he added, "Yes, she's an uncommon pretty and nice girl. You haven't anything to say against it, have you? because, look here, when I choose a wife—"

"I shall be the first to wish you joy; and, really, you could not do better than marry Marjory; she has beauty, birth, and an excellent temper; you can dispense with wealth, having so much of your own. When will you speak to her?"

"Oh! there's no hurry about the matter; she is young, and I like my freedom; she is not entangled with any fellow."

"There you are mistaken. She is even engaged, but without her father's consent. Still, I believe he is quite ready to give it, and this is why, dear Linley, I have ventured to speak on such a delicate subject to you. I cannot bear to think the boy I love should be cheated of his desire."

"You're a brick," returned Linley, elegantly, whilst his light eyes darkened, and his sallow face flushed, "and I'm hanged if any other fellow shall have her. I'll ask her to-day."

"Better interview Mr. Mortimer first; I will prepare the way for you, and, of course, when she learns you love her, she cannot be proof against you, because, although you are not handsome, you have most irresistible ways."

He greedily swallowed the fulsome flattery, saying, "Look here, I'm not an ungrateful fellow, and you won't have any cause to regret helping me. I've all along said, haven't I? that it was a beastly shame my father should leave you unprovided for. If you win Marjory for me I'll give you a lump sum down to do with as you will."

"No, you shall buy me a small annuity. Mr. Mortimer is not quite so well to do as he represented, and, what he has will certainly go to his daughter, if Alison Comyn has her way—but we can speak of this later on. Just now, dear boy, I can think only of your happiness. But when he had left her, she stood with a strange smile upon her lips, "Oh, the fool! the vain fool!" she

thought, "how little he guesses what scorn I have for him! how I use him to my own ends! He shall marry Marjory, that will insure my future and keep the money in the family. I will see that he makes her handsome settlements, so that in any case I shall not want. She is a generous girl and simple enough for my purpose, but I shall have to get rid of Madame Comyn before I can bend my pretty Marjory to my will. Fortunately Roger is just now incensed against her. It will not be my fault if any reconciliation takes place between them. She may hate but she never shall despise me."

Possessed by such amiable thoughts, Mrs. Mortimer returned to the house, and finding her husband alone, perched herself on his knee.

"You wanted my advice about Marjory's love affair," she said with an arch look. "Well, my dear, I have been thinking it all over, and really, I consider Mr. Howard a most presumptuous young man. He is not the dear child's equal either in birth or breeding, and you would be sadly wronging her if you permitted her to throw herself away upon a beggarly clerk. You must send him away; she is too young to be seriously in love with him, and to-day I have received another proposal for her hand. Linley wants to marry her—stop, hear me out. You know that he is very rich; Marjory's life would be one long dream of luxury and love, if she accepted him. Then you would keep your daughter, and I should not lose my boy."

"It would be a most excellent arrangement," said Mr. Mortimer, "but Marjory seems infatuated with Howard; and then there is Alison—"

"The child can be taught reason; you and I are now her proper advisers, not Mrs. Comyn, and in every way the union is desirable."

"Well, I'd better write Howard a refusal. You must manage Marjory and my sister; I am afraid you will not find either of them amenable to reason, and Alison is sure to say that if Marjory is too young to accept her first lover, she is also too young for Linley."

"The one man has his way to make, the other's future is assured."

"True; well, I will leave it all to you, my dear; you are cleverer than I, and doubtless know how to manage your own sex best."

So the matter was arranged. Mr. Mortimer sent a most decided refusal to Roslyn, and having so far relieved his mind, summoned his daughter to his presence. Briefly he told her that, under no circumstances, would he allow any engagement between herself and Roslyn; and intimated his own wishes very plainly.

The colour, which had faded from her cheeks, rushed into them once more, and with her usually gentle eyes flashing fire, she said,—

"This is monstrous, father; and I will not do it. I hate Linley Gaveston, I am sure he is not a good man, now he has proved himself dishonourable too—"

"You are free for him to woo and win if he can."

"No father, I am not free, I never shall be until Roslyn himself gives me back my promise, and he loves me too well to do that."

"At least you will give Linley a hearing!" She stood thoughtful and quiet a moment, then said,—

"Yes, it is better he should understand at once how impossible it is for me to care for him. Father, I will obey you so far as this; I will neither see nor correspond with Roslyn until I have obtained your permission, but even duty cannot demand the sacrifice of my whole life's happiness, and so I will not marry Linley."

"You will learn to speak differently soon," he answered, savagely. "Remember, I have the ruling of your fate, and now you may go, you most disobedient and ungrateful of children."

She fled at once to her aunt, who, hearing the truth, rose in her just wrath and went in search of her brother. She found him with his wife talking in a loud, excited fashion, whilst Lillias listened with veiled eyes.

"Roger, I must speak with you. It cannot surely be true that you intend to coerce Marjory into a marriage she loathes! I will not stand by and see it done."

"I do not know that you have power to oppose or stay it. I am the fittest judge as to what is or is not good for my daughter."

"You are not proving yourself so when you send away an honest suitor for such a man as Linley Gaveston."

"May I ask you to remember, madam, you speak of my stepson?" questioned Lillias, blandly.

"I do not forget that fact," returned Mrs. Comyn, frostily; "that alone cannot alter my opinion as to his character, or make him more worthy Marjory. I say that it is a sin and shame that her father should seek to coerce her into marriage with him. But for the influence you have brought to bear upon him he would never have entertained such a preposterous idea; for some reason best known to yourself, you wish this alliance."

"Roger, am I to submit to your sister's gratuitous insults? Who is first in your regard, Mrs. Comyn or I?" Lillias demanded, with a dangerous look in her grey eyes.

"Can you ask! Alison, you must remember that you are no longer mistress of the house; that your sway is not absolute. I must insist that you apologise to Lillias for your disgraceful insinuations."

Mrs. Comyn, drawing herself to her full height, regarded him with but slightly veiled contempt.

"I will not retract one word of the truth."

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," remarked Lillias, "and a man's first thought should be of his wife. Ever since I came here, Roger, Mrs. Comyn has done her best to thwart me, to set me at naught; I have tried to conciliate her but failed. She has instilled suspicion of me in Marjory's mind, and—and, oh! I am very wretched."

Here she hid her face in her handkerchief and wept, or appeared to weep.

Her seeming distress roused Mr. Mortimer's temper to fever heat.

"Alison," he cried, "either you own yourself in the wrong, and promise to refrain from interfering or you go."

"Do you mean that, brother?" she questioned, her heart throbbing madly, for she loved him next to Marjory, and it was hard to be driven out of his home because of a woman, her instinct told her, was both false and cruel.

"I am a man of my word," he began, when the white anguish of her face stirred him to compassion.

Lillias was quick to see this, to know that if left to himself he would relent, and broke in hurriedly,—

"If we are ever to be happy, it must be so. Apart, Alison and I may be very good friends; under the same roof we never can exist peaceably. I have no anger against her, but I want to be first with my husband; and, perhaps, when she realises that I have only Marjory's good at heart, she will understand and like me better; as a visitor she will be always welcome, but as a permanent member of the household—no! She has ruled here too long to be able to take a second place."

With her eyes still fixed on her brother's face, Mrs. Comyn waited for him to speak, knowing before the words fell from his lips what her doom would be.

"I think that Lillias is right; that you often let your zeal outrun your discretion; that it is for the happiness of all you should go. Of course you will have access to Marjory, and she may visit you from time to time. We will part friends."

"Tell me how long a period of grace remains to me," she interrupted.

"If a thing is to be done it is best done quickly," said Lillias.

"Thank you; you have a happy tact in speeding the parting; I will go to-night. But have a care how you treat the child I have reared and loved as I might have loved my own. Brother, I will wish you good-by now; I would rather not see you again until the memory of this bitter scene and your black ingratitude is less keen."

Then, without another word or look at Lillias, she went out, and up to her own room, where Marjory was waiting. With her arms about the

girl she broke into bitter and unaccustomed tears,—

"Oh, my dear, my dear, they are tearing us asunder; that woman is driving me from the home in which I hoped to end my days; and if you trust in her truth or mercy she will consign you to certain misery. Be strong, be steadfast, you will need all your courage and endurance; and you are so pitifully young."

CHAPTER V.

THEY clung together weeping sorely; then Marjory said,—

"Oh, take me with you, auntie; my father does not need me, and I—oh, I shall hate her always for her cruelty to you; I will not remain behind."

"My darling there is no help for you; the law remains with your father, he is only acting within his rights. I am leaving you alone in the midst of danger, and you will have much to endure; but I think that your love for Roslyn will be your safeguard, and Heaven will not suffer an innocent girl to fall a prey to Lillias Mortimer's machinations."

"But, auntie, what shall I do without you! Oh, that is selfish of me. I ought rather to ask what will you do, where will you go?"

"To-night I am going to beg a shelter of the Howards; to-morrow I shall start for Chester, where I lived in my brief happy married time, and when I have found a suitable home I will write you to forward my belongings. It will be something for you to do, and will keep you from brooding over your troubles; but Marjory, if they grow too many and too heavy for you to bear, you must find a way to escape and come to me. I will hide you securely, so that we may defy that woman whose name I hate to breathe. Now dear one, kiss me and let me go; I am unnerved, but I would not break down before her, so you must be strong my Marjory."

They parted with many a tender caress; but neither wept any more, because Marjory had accompanied her aunt to the hall, and each knew that every word uttered, every broken sob, would be overheard by Lillias, who sat in a room close by with the door flung wide.

"One opponent moved from the board," thought that lady gleefully, "the rest will be easy," and then as Mrs. Comyn passed out she joined Marjory, slipping her arm about the slender waist, she said,—

"Dear child, no doubt you are thinking very badly of me, but indeed I do not deserve your anger; and it is best for you that at such a critical time in your life you should be parted from Mrs. Comyn; I am afraid, very much afraid, Marjory, she has taught you to regard your father as an ogre, instead of your best and truest friend, and I know that she has most persistently prevented us from understanding one another. We have got to alter all that, dear; I am your mother!"

"Auntie has been as my mother so many years that I can put no other in her place," interrupted Marjory, trembling at her own boldness, "and I will never hear one word spoken against her. She is the best and dearest of women."

"She has been good indeed to you, and I admire your loyalty; but if I am content to take a second place in your heart—"

"Oh, I cannot promise you even that; because you have driven her away," and escaping from her stepmother's embrace she ran hurriedly upstairs.

Lillias looked after her with darkening face, then suddenly she laughed low and softly,—

"Take care! take care *ma belle Marjory*! It is not good to anger me; I never forget, I never forgive an offence, and you may suffer for your stupidity. Bah! how can a child like that stand against me?" She glanced down at her hands, they were little and slender, with a delicate pink line beneath the nails; but as she clenched and unclenched them they looked not only strong but cruel. "I could crush her like a butterfly; brush all the delicate bloom from her wings, but I prefer soft measures when they do not

spoil my plans," and still smiling she retraced her steps.

That night she secured the opportunity for Linley to plead his cause. She felt certain he would be most promptly rejected, but she did not intend to suffer defeat; only it behoved her to move carefully, seeing that Marjory distrusted her every word and action. So she sat in brooding thought, until suddenly a bright idea occurred to her, and again she laughed.

"Eureka! I have it; it will be very hard indeed if my darling stepdaughter can resist my wiles. I wonder how Linley is prospering."

He was standing over Marjory white with passion, his lips tremulous, and his eyes full of angry fire, for to his pleading she had given a most emphatic and contemptuous "No."

"You think you can defy me and disgrace your family by marrying that beggarly Howard, but you are mistaken; your father is my ally, and Lillias intends you should be my wife. Oh, she is a clever one, there is no outwitting her. So you had better give in with good grace; I am an ugly customer when offended, and I might take payment for the insults you have heaped on me in a fashion you would not like—once I get you in my power. Say 'yes,' or by Heaven you shall rue it all your days."

"If I am not to be won by entreaties, I should scarcely yield to threats," Marjory answered bravely, although she was on the very verge of tears, "and I cannot think my father has so little love for me that he will suffer me to be the victim of your cowardly persecution. If you were a man you would not try to steal another's bride from him."

"Might is right, and the strength is on my side," coarsely. "I shall use it. Why cannot you be reasonable? Most girls in your position would jump at the chance offered you!"

"Oh, how hateful you are," she burst out, indignantly, "if anything could make me despise you more than I already do it would be your low estimate of my sex, your extremely high one of 'the almighty dollar.' I won't marry you," she added, in childish fashion, "and you must tell my father so."

He lifted his hand, as though to strike her, but with a sharp cry she turned and fled leaving him scowling there.

"The little vixen, I'll win her yet, if only for the fun of breaking her spirit, and paying her back in her own coin. I wonder what will be Lillias' next move?"

He was not left long in doubt; when he went to her in his blind fury she only laughed at him.

"My dear Linley, you do not intend to be frightened by a girl's 'no,' or accept it as final! Leave it all to me, and do not doubt me whatever I do; remember I have a difficult part to play. I have both father and daughter to manage, and it requires much tact to play such a dual part. But I have promised you shall have Marjory, and you know that I have never failed you yet."

Then she went to Mortimer.

"The silly child has refused Linley point blank; now, I will tell you nothing more if you begin to rave—and, dear, it is just like a man to use brute force and so defeat his own purpose. I am going to try kindness and a little righteous deception, asking only that you will trust me fully."

He hesitated; he had been an upright and honourable gentleman until he fell beneath this woman's spell.

Now his sense of right and wrong was considerably deadened, so that after a brief struggle with himself he said,—

"You shall do precisely as you please; I cannot do better than trust you. But I do wish, Lillias, it had not been necessary to drive poor Alison away—she laboured so long for us—"

"And traded on her long service. There, dear, I will say no more because she is your sister; and when Marjory is happily settled, she shall return to us, if only she will not try to wean you from me."

So Alison Comyn left for Chester, and life looked very dark to Marjory; her father had treated her with systematic harshness.

Linley dogged her steps, persecuting her in many ways, and only Lillias was kind. She was

not allowed to walk alone, or to correspond with any save her aunt; there was small wonder that she grew so pale and wan, that in her weakness and depression she felt how hopeless was the fight before her.

Then one morning when her spirits were at their lowest ebb, Lillias entered her room, smiling; she had just returned from walking, and was looking unusually young and well.

"My dear Marjory, I am the naughtiest woman in the world to thwart your father, but I cannot bear to see you so downcast; I thought it was only a boy and girl attachment between you and Mr. Howard, and I am grieved you cannot care for poor Linley—but, child, you must be guided by your conscience and your heart—and so guess what I have done; but you never will, and I won't keep you in suspense. Put on hat and cloak, go down to the clematis arbour, and you will find Mr. Howard waiting, by my invitation, there to see you."

The pale cheeks flushed rosily, the blue eyes were dewy as she said,—

"Have you really done so much for me? Are you really and truly my friend?"

"Really and truly; there, kiss me, child, and go; you have only a brief half-hour at your disposal. Your father must not find your lover here."

Marjory kissed the fair false face with real gratitude, then flying down the stairs made her way to the spot where Roslyn waited.

"My darling, my darling, I have you once again; let me look at you. How wan and pale you are—this has been a cruel time for you—worse even than I guessed. Oh, Marjie, if only I could take you away now!"

"I do not seem to mind anything much now that we are together; it is the silence between us that is so trying—I could bear separation if only we might correspond," she answered, clinging about him, "and is it true Mrs. Mortimer really brought you here? It seems so strange that we should find a friend in her."

"I think we have all been misjudging her; she admitted she was disappointed at your choice, but she spoke of you with such kindness, she even cried to think she had been instrumental in bringing you trouble. I was passing her by without any sign of recognition, when she ran after me, and begged me to return—she has promised too, to compass an occasional meeting for us—I declare I could kiss her!"

Marjory looked troubled.

"I hate to seem ungrateful, but auntie begged me never to trust her, and auntie's instinct was rarely at fault."

"Still no one is infallible, and Mrs. Comyns might be blinded by prejudice."

"Oh, she is the justest, most charitable woman on earth. I don't know what to think of this sudden change of front."

"Think! that we have together wronged your stepmother, as I am sure we have, and spend the time between this and our next meeting in recovering your tone; I cannot bear to see my young sweetheart so changed."

"Oh, Roslyn, it is all so very hard, and I was never brave, but for your sake I will try to keep fast hold of my courage, because there must be dawn after dark, and I know that you are true as steel."

"That knowledge should hearten you; and now that we have Mrs. Mortimer for an ally the burthen is considerably lightened. I begged her to permit some correspondence, but this she refused, save in a case of emergency, fearing your father's anger if he discovered her connivance. She is resolute to fight our cause, but declares nothing must be hastily or recklessly done; when the time is ripe for me to speak to your father again she will write or call on me. We owe her a very heavy debt, my own; when we are happy together, we must not forget all her goodness."

Meanwhile Lillias was telling Linley what she had done; he listened with darkening face and lowering brow, asking at the close of her story—

"What the d—! I do you mean by playing fast and loose with me! What is your game now? for I am confounded if I can see it!"

"Blind! Blind!" she laughed blithely, "oh,

how dense you men are! There, don't glare so savagely at me and I will enlighten your darkness. Briefly, I intend to win the confidence and gratitude of these turtle doves, and that done, I shall strike at the very root of their love. I cannot quite tell how at present, but neither will see my hand in the matter; then you must take your chance and use it well."

CHAPTER VI.

OF Lillias, Mr. Mortimer asked no questions, being content to leave matters in her hands; she had gained complete mastery over him, in such subtle fashion, however, that he did not suspect he had no alternative but to follow where she led.

So until the winter was well advanced the lovers met almost weekly, and although Linley fretted and fumed, he dare not oppose his step-mother.

But Marjory's coldness, the fact that she belonged to another, only fanned the passion he disguised by the name of love, into fiercer flame.

It chanced towards the close of December that Roslyn was again called to town, and being unable to return at the time appointed for his meeting with Marjory, he ventured to write her.

Lillias always took possession of all letters (for purposes of her own) distributing them to the several addresses.

This morning she found one in a strange handwriting for her step-daughter; she guessed in an instant that it was from Roslyn and conveyed some important news; so she confiscated it, and after breakfast, returning to her room, she coolly broke the seal and read—

"DARLING OF MY HEART,—

"I have been offered a post in the branch bank here at a salary of three hundred a year, and a share of the premises for a residence. It really means that at no distant time I shall be made sub-manager; so you see there is every prospect of happiness before us. Shall I accept it remains for you to decide, and in the event of a favourable decision I shall want my little wife to come at once to me. My mother and sisters would share our home, as their united incomes are so small they require supplementing. But you know, and I believe love them too well, to grudge them the little help I give, or a share of our home. Pray Mrs. Mortimer to excuse me for breaking her hard and fast rule concerning our correspondence, and contrive to let me have an answer by return of post, as I am only allowed until to-morrow before sending in my answer. Ah, dear, let it be yes, because that little word would bring our happiness so much the nearer."

"Always your loyal lover,

"ROSLYN."

Lillias sat brooding over the letter in her hand. She was not one to act rashly, and it behaved her to move with special care now, for a false step meant ruin to her plans, disgrace to herself.

Suddenly her eyes brightened, as she said—

"Nothing could be more felicitous; everything is playing into my hands, the game is mine."

She remembered that Roslyn was wholly unacquainted with Marjory's handwriting, so she resolved to reply to him herself; seating herself at her davenport, she wrote rapidly—

"DEAR ROSLYN,

"I wish you had not broken Mrs. Mortimer's rule, because it has led to some unpleasantness between her and my father, he has become very suspicious, and he insisted that your letter should be given him; but for my step-mother I should have known nothing of its contents; and very kind to me. By all means accept the post offered you, as it is a step in the right direction; but it will be a long time before I can come to you. If I were of age it would be so different, as it is we must try and wait patiently for each other. You must excuse brevity, as Mrs. Mortimer is waiting to post this; I will write you again at my earliest opportunity. With

hearty congratulations on your good fortune, and much love, believe me always,

"YOUR OWN LITTLE MARJORY."

It was not a very satisfactory letter; there was but small warmth in it, Lillias admitted to herself, but it was the first step to the end, and she went out with an air of triumph to despatch it to Roslyn, meeting Mrs. Howard on the way.

"From Marjory," she said, holding the envelope playfully before the other's eyes, "but really these young people must curb their impetuosity, as Mr. Mortimer is angry even with me, for aiding and abetting them. I dare not promise to be their go-between any longer, because I have a duty to perform to my husband."

Having dropped this little seed in Mrs. Howard's mind she continued on her way in triumph.

The next day she showed Marjory a notice in the local paper.

"We are glad to announce that our esteemed young fellow-townsmen has been appointed to an important post in the London branch of Messrs. Morley and Throssell. Our only regret is that he and his accomplished relatives are thus lost to us; for Mrs. and the Misses Howard are to join him immediately."

"Oh!" cried Marjory, growing white, "he should not have gone without a word, without a good-bye. It is too cruel, now I shall never see him, what shall I do? oh, what shall I do? If I might write—"

"No dear, not just yet; Roslyn will send you news of his welfare in a day or two when he is more settled. Really, Marjie, there is no cause for grief or doubt; why, your faith in him is smaller than mine."

"I don't doubt him," the poor child urged, "but—but—it seems a little hard he should have gone without one word to me."

She said no more, but Lillias saw that she watched anxiously for every post, knew that unless she took some definite step, Marjory would contrive to send some message to her lover which would make all her best laid plans "gang agley."

It was now nearly the end of January and never had a year dawned so unhappily for Marjory. She was sitting alone in her room thinking sadly of the past, drearily enough of the future (for since he went away Roslyn had not written) when Lillias entered with the local paper.

"Something to amuse yourself with, dear," she remarked, cheerfully. "I cannot bear to see you moping. There, you shall read to me whilst I work," and producing a small but dainty piece of embroidery, she seated herself at such an angle that she could see every change in her step-daughter's face, which she furtively watched, as she read through the columns somewhat listlessly. All at once there came a sharp cry, as the girl rose, white and trembling.

"Oh, look, look! it cannot be true! He never would so deceive me," and with shaking finger, she pointed to a short paragraph, for which (had she but known the truth) Lillias was responsible.

"We are pleased to announce the forthcoming marriage of Mr. Roslyn Howard, to Marion, only daughter of Mr. Bretherton, manager of the London branch of Messrs. Morley and Throssell. The ceremony will take place early in March."

Even that bold woman's heart felt a throb of pity as her eyes met the sweet blue ones above so full of despair and anguish of soul; but it was necessary for her own welfare that this thing should be, and all her life long, she had made self her first consideration, her dearest idol.

"Oh, Marjie! Marjie! my darling, this is terrible; but I cannot believe Roslyn Howard could be so very false. If it is true, then always I shall blame myself that I encouraged your meetings. I loved you so well I only thought of your ultimate happiness, and he seemed so true."

"It is more than a month," Marjory said, drearily, "since he went away, and in all that time he has made no sign—and yet—and yet—oh! I cannot think he was playing with me, making a cruel mock of my love."

"I am certain that he cared for you when he was with you. Take courage, Marjory, it may be all a mistake. Shall I write him! After

such an announcement as this it would be unwise for you to do so."

"Will you! Oh, how good you are to me—mother—some day I will repay you if I can;" then suddenly flinging out her arms she fell face downwards on a couch, sobbing uncontrollably, whilst Lilia watched her with strange eyes.

"I am a fool to pity her," she was thinking, "or to let myself care even so little for her. But she called me—mother, perhaps, if a child had been born to me I should have been a better woman."

Then she spoke to Marjory.

"Child! child! this will never do, you will make yourself positively ill; and how foolish that will be, for if Roslyn is true, you will be ashamed of yourself for doubting him; if he is false you will hate yourself that you could so grieve for such an unworthy creature."

"Let me alone; oh, let me alone! I feel as though everything worth having was slipping out of my life. In a little while I shall be calm—but now, when the blow is so keen—I—I—oh! my heart will break," and as she broke into a fresh paroxysm of grief, Lilia slipped away.

In the privacy of her chamber she indited two letters, one purporting to be from Marjory, the other from herself in a feigned handwriting.

Marjory's ran thus:—

"MY DEAR MR. HOWARD,—

"I scarcely know how to write you, being so dreadfully afraid of your anger; but it would be greater wrong to marry you and so spoil all your life, than to tell you the truth now. I am ashamed to think that I so wantonly accepted your affection. I did care for you once, I care for you now, more than for any other; but since my father's second marriage we have lived in such an atmosphere of luxury, that I feel convinced that I am more than ever unfitted for a poor man's wife. I have been very wicked, and I deeply regret it; but Mr. Gaveston has again renewed his attentions, and I have accepted them. I have tried to tell you this so often, but just as often failed; only this morning I promised to become his wife, so I pray you to release me. I am not acting under coercion, but of my own free will. Dear, you must forgive me; I am only a foolish shallow creature; and you would have repented marrying me before our honeymoon had waned. Mr. Gaveston neither asks nor expects much of me; he will be content just to call me wife, and the marriage will please my father. I shall always think of you with affection and hope that your future will be as prosperous as mine promises to be.

"Yours regretfully,

"MARJORY MORTIMER."

The other letter was shorter and ran thus,—

"DEAR MR. HOWARD,—

"Marjory has spared me the pain of telling you the truth by writing you herself; but I cannot help grieving that by compassing your meetings I have fostered your love. Her father and Mr. Gaveston of course are delighted with her change of mind; but I feel as though I can never so dearly love her again; I believed her so unworthy, I find her so mercenary. Still she has some scruples of conscience, and has begged me to ask a favour of you; it is that you will send her a line assuring her she is free—indeed, you may well rejoice that you have escaped life-long companionship with one who prefers gold to love. Believe that you have my sincerest sympathy in your present trial.

"LILIA MORTIMER."

Then like a spider waiting its victim she watched and waited for Roslyn's answer; it must fall into no hands but hers, lest it should convey some message which should undeceive the hapless Marjory.

Roslyn was alone when the two letters reached him; eagerly snatching up what he believed to be Marjory's he read it through with wild eyes and blanched face.

His Marjory false, mercenary! It could not be

true, he would not believe it; he would run down to Langbridge and see her.

Then he opened the second missive, and his face hardened—it was true—she was all unworthy his love, she had wickedly, and wantonly spoiled his life, let her go, he would not stoop to plead with her, because if she yielded to his entreaties and returned to her allegiance, he never again could trust her. So he wired,—

"I give you back your freedom; it is the least I can do," and this was the message Lilia conveyed to Marjory.

CHAPTER VII.

THE poor child broke utterly down then, and for a few days was so ill that Lilia forebore to speak to her of Roslyn; but when a week had passed, and she found her sitting brooding by her window, she laid her hands upon her shoulders with an affectionate gesture.

"My dear, my dear, this will never do; you must rouse yourself; never let it be said you wear the willow for Roslyn Howard's sake. Maidenly pride must teach you to hide your pain, for it is a cruel world, and if you wear your heart on your sleeve, every daw will pluck at it."

"But what can I do!" Marjory asked drearly, "forgetfulness is impossible and my wound is so new; perhaps in a little while I shall learn to be brave—but oh! it is hard! it is hard! I deceived my father for his sake, I gave him love such as he cannot understand, and now he can make sport of me with her."

"Day and night I am haunted by a sense of shame, by the echo of words I have read,—

"The roses that his hands have plucked are sweet to me, are death to me;
Between them, as through living flames, I pass, I clutch them, crush them, see!
The bloom for her the thorn for me."

"It was in the time of roses my great gladness came to me, and now I never shall be glad again. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"If I speak will you be angry?" asked Lilia, kneeling beside her, her arms about the slender waist. "Ah, dear, it may seem worldly counsel to you, and bitter to hearken to now, when your heart is so sore, but it is safe counsel—show Roslyn Howard that you are not hurt, that you too can play at love. Do not let him have the poor satisfaction of knowing life can never be quite the same to you because of him—there are other men in the world."

But Marjory rose with an awful cry.

"There is only one for me and he is false;" and there was such a strange look in her lovely eyes that Lilia, who, if not as harmless as the dove was wiser than the serpent, pressed her no further then.

But as day followed day she renewed the attack, appealing always to Marjory's pride; and as by subtle means she still further incensed Mr. Mortimer against his child, home was a wretched place to her.

"Disobedience gets its own reward," he said once, "and you are justly punished for your deceit. Your stepmother has pleaded for you, but I am scarcely likely to forget that you defied me, choosing rather to pin your faith to a man who regarded you as good sport."

"Father!" she cried, "do not say these bitter things to me."

"They are less bitter than those Langbridge ones—folks say you are pining for love of a man who found you good fun for idle hours."

The words had been suggested to him by something Lilia had said, and he was frightened at the effect they had upon Marjory; she leapt to her feet, grasping him by the arms, whilst her eyes blazed into his.

"Do they say that?" she gasped, "tell me the whole truth, I can bear it."

"Oh Roger, how could you repeat such horrid things to her," murmured Lilia, stealing in, "we who know her best, pay little heed to them, and surely we can afford to laugh at the opinion of the hydra-headed. In a little while, dear child, all will be forgotten."

"But I shall not forget; I shall remember always until my dying day. Is there nothing I can do to fling back the lie in their teeth?"

"Why yes, Marjory," her father answered, almost blandly, "you can marry Linley."

"Oh no, no, no! I have never even liked him; and it would be so indecently soon, he cannot wish this thing to be."

"But he does, dear," coaxed Lilia, "he freely forgives all the past, and is content to take you as you are, hoping that his love will compel yours."

"He is very generous," the poor child said, "but he might not always be satisfied with his poor bargain, and then I should be in a worse condition than now."

"Let me send him to you; he loves you honestly, you cannot fail to be touched by his devotion; and, as his wife, Roslyn Howard's boasting concerning you will fall flat."

Her good and bad angels were fighting for mastery with her, and the bad conquered; love, thrown back upon itself, resembled hatred most; pride clamoured loudly to be heard, and, with a passionate gesture, Marjory cried,—

"Let it be as you will, I no longer care what happens to me; I cannot well be more wretched."

To strike while the iron was hot was Mrs. Mortimer's ruling principle, and she lost no time in sending Linley to her stepdaughter.

"Once she has given her word," she said, "all will be safe; Marjory has old-fashioned ideas of honour and truth. I hope Linley will treat her well, she is a good little soul."

Marjory was standing before a window when the young man entered. Never very prepossessing in appearance, his evident nervousness rendered him still less attractive, and he had a guilty air as he said,—

"I suppose you can guess what errand brings me here, Marjory!"

"Yes," she answered, without turning her head; "you wish to marry me!"

"I have wished it ever since we first met; but you have been so cold and cruel to me always, I began to despair. Now Lilia says I may hope, and I swear I'll never throw Howard in your teeth, but do my level best to make you happy. Marjory, can't you say you love me just a little?"

As she confronted him he saw her face was deadly white, her eyes unnaturally brilliant.

"No," she said, "I do not love you and I never shall; I gave my heart once and for all; the gift was spurned, but I never can take it back. I will marry you if you care to have a loveless wife; I will do my duty towards you, but nothing else will I promise—affection, happiness, faith are lost to me, I am dead to them. If you take me it will be for that poor beauty you have been pleased to praise, and which will fade with every fading year. I am unutterably weary of myself, of all things belonging to my old life."

"Then begin a new one with me. You have spoken some very unpleasant truths, but I make allowance for your natural disappointment and mortification. We will agree to forget both, and I take you on your own terms, for I love you beyond a little."

She was not touched by his words, and when he sought to kiss her she shrank back hastily.

"Not now, not just yet; have patience." And, frowning, he returned to his old position.

He stood gawing the ends of his moustache, whilst his light eyes scanned every feature of the delicate face; then he said,—

"And when is it to be?"

She started violently.

"I do not understand; you must be more explicit."

"Well, then," in a coarse tone, "when will you marry me; I cannot see any reason for delay."

"Let it be when you will," wearily, "I have no choice in the matter."

"Then I may arrange all with your father, without reference to you?"

"Yes, you are to be my master; it is as well to get used to my thralldom."

He stared with amazement at her; a few weeks ago she had been a mere child in manner and speech, now she was a woman embittered by treachery and suffering.

"Well, in a little while she would forget, and if not," he set his teeth savagely as he thought, "if she will not love, at least she shall fear me."

In a not very enviable frame of mind he left her, and presently Lillias joined her.

She had not changed her attitude, but on the young face was frozen a look of such despair that even the woman who had compassed her misery felt a throb of pity.

But this was no time for condolence, so slipping an arm about Marjory, she said,—

"A thousand congratulations, my dear! You have acted well and wisely. I know just now you feel it utterly impossible to love poor Linley; but gratitude for his goodness will pave the way to warmer regard; and at least Roslyn Howard cannot boast that he has broken your heart."

A shiver passed over the slender figure, then slowly the white hands went up to shield the white, tortured face, as with a terrible sob, Marjory said,—

"Heaven forgive me; I am a wicked woman to barter my heart's true love away; but it is done, and I must abide by my promise—unless death comes first, and it is for death I pray."

"This is foolish!" broke in Lillias. "One day you will smile to think what a trouble you made of a man's desertion. My dear child, there isn't one under the sun worth fretting oneself about."

Marjory shook herself free of her embrace, saying only,—

"You do not understand," and Lillias forbore to press her further.

Duly arrangements were made for this unhallowed marriage, Linley declaring from the first that it should be solemnised in the house according to American fashion. To this Lillias was opposed, desiring as she did to make a grand function of it; but Marjory, wounded to the soul, heartsick and weary, caught eagerly at the idea.

She made but one stipulation which was that Mrs. Comyn should not hear of her marriage until it was an accomplished fact.

"Auntie is not like you and I," she said, listlessly to Lillias; "she believes that love should always enter into such a contract. We are wiser, but I am not so hardened yet in your philosophy that her pleading would not move me."

And the second Mrs. Mortimer was glad indeed that Alison Comyn should have no chance to upset her plans.

The wedding morning dawned cold and cloudy, but Lillias cared little for the weather, she was in a jubilant frame of mind, for only the previous night Linley had presented her with a cheque for five thousand pounds as a reward for her efforts in his behalf; this she intended to invest cautiously because if her husband discovered she had no private income he might ask awkward questions, and having made her way into respectable society, she did not intend to fall out of it through any fault of her own. Henceforth she was resolved to be eminently respectable.

She dressed the pale bride with something of tenderness in her touch, for she knew, full well, that Linley was unworthy of her; and then she led her downstairs—a white-robed, shrinking figure. Mr. Mortimer and the bridegroom were waiting her with the clergyman who had both christened and confirmed her. It seemed to the unhappy girl that he looked reproachfully at her, and a sob rose to her lips; she was so friendless now, she could not afford to lose even his liking and esteem.

Now she stood by Linley's side; the first sentences of the solemn services were read, when the hall bell was rung violently. Then followed a brief colloquy, the next instant a tall, richly dressed woman appeared in the doorway. She gave one rapid glance round, then advancing, laid her hand upon Linley's shoulder. With a cry that was almost a shriek he lifted his eyes to hers, then shrank back as though he feared violence. She laughed shortly.

"Ever the same," she said scornfully, "always a knave and a coward. Gentlemen, there will be no marriage to-day; this man is my husband, and, thank heaven, I have arrived in time to save that poor girl from his clutches."

"Your husband!" cried Lillias, "it is false.

If he had married he would have confessed it to me; he had no secrets from me."

"Save one," returned the visitor, adding quickly, "look to this poor girl;" but before anyone could stretch out a helping hand Marjory had fallen senseless face downwards to the floor. In the tumult which followed Linley would have made good his escape, but the visitor held him fast.

"Get Miss Mortimer to her room," she said, "then I will tell you my story. You shall know what manner of man you would have welcomed into your midst."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHITE and tearless Marjory lay upon her bed. She had begged Lillias to leave her, saying, she wanted only to be alone. Through all the shame and misery which had befallen her she was vaguely conscious of a sense of relief. Now she need never marry; she would go to Aunt Alison and beg for shelter until she could find work to do. She could not remain at Langbridge, the cynosure for every curious eye, the recipient alike of condolences and blame. She scarcely felt curiosity concerning the woman who had saved her from a wretched fate. When she was less weary Lillias would tell her all that was necessary; until then she was content just to tell Linley could not claim her.

Meanwhile, a very uncomfortable time was being experienced below. Still keeping fast hold of Linley, the woman who called herself his wife, spoke hurriedly and with a strong American accent.

"Look at him, the man to whom you would have given your child," she said to Mr. Mortimer, "does he seem worthy such a gift? Oh, there have been times when remembering all his falsehood I could have fallen upon and killed him. But my fury so spent, I do not love him, and I will claim the redress the laws of my country will give me if I appeal to them. Divorce is not hard to get over the sea. I was a poor dancing-girl when Linley Gaveston saw and thought he loved me, he offered me marriage, but our union was to be kept a secret until his father died. Then I worshipped him as much as now I loathe him, and I consented. I do you the justice, madam, (glancing towards Lillias) to believe that you had no knowledge of our union, or of his subsequent conduct. We had been married just a year when Mr. Gaveston died, leaving all he possessed to his son, to your utter exclusion, you best know why. I then begged my husband to acknowledge me for a child had been born to us, and, for his sake, I was jealous of my fair fame. From time to time he put me off. Let him deny it if he dare; and then, suddenly, without one word of warning, he left New York, not caring whether I lived or died. Remember, I loved him then, and through much grieving I lost my health. I fell sick and was near to death's door. Then my baby died—of want—I had neither money nor friends, and he starved. When they laid him dead in my arms, the last remnants of my love died too, and I vowed that I would follow him, watch him, punish him as he deserved. I grew strong again, and returned to my old profession. I worked hard, I rose; presently 'Lola' (the name I adopted) began to grow famous. I worked steadily on, never once losing sight of my husband; and then, when my name was in all mouths, I followed him to England. Two years I have been fulfilling engagements here, but I never sought him out; only yesterday, when I read the announcement of his coming marriage (a little error of yours, madam) I determined to expose him. Linley Gaveston can you deny one word I have spoken?"

He seemed to shrivel under her scornful glance. "Pon my word, Elina," he stammered, "I might well believe you dead; it is so long since we met. Look here, you hate me, and I return the compliment; what will you take to leave me in peace? You can get a divorce, and this marriage you have so rudely interrupted can take place at a later date."

His effrontery staggered Mr. Mortimer; but Lillias, who was agile as a cat sprang forward, and striking him smartly across the mouth, said,—

"Knave and fool, I have done with you; I know you for an imbecile, but not a rogue."

"Marjory deserves a better fate than you. Leave this house as soon as possible, and never let me see your face again. Madam, we freely return you your husband."

"And I refuse the gift," the dancer retorted, "I have fulfilled my mission, and henceforth have no share or part in his life; now that I see him with eyes not blinded by love, I wonder that ever I could have stooped so low as to care for him. Linley—I shall never see you again—and my parting words to you are—when your time to die comes, remember your child, and ask for mercy if you dare!"

Then, as suddenly as she had appeared, she left the little assembly, and no one sought to stay her. Then Linley spoke sullenly,—

"You, least of all, should turn against me," he said, not daring to meet the bright eyes of the woman he addressed, "where would you be now if I had not stuck to you in all and through all? You had not a penny-piece of your own either when you became my father's wife or when he left you a widow. You best know why he bequeathed everything to me, as you know who has supplied all your needs, who gave you a substantial cheque only—"

"Silence!" she cried, "speak another word if you dare; I am stronger than you; presently you will need my help; I am not a forgiving woman, if you injure me you will work out your own ruin."

Then Mortimer spoke.

"I should like to know what this scoundrel means. You will oblige me, madam, by going into details."

She laughed shortly.

"It would occupy too much time; rest content with me as I am; I have not proved myself an ill-tempered woman to you—and this poor wretch can do me no harm. Who would believe him if he spoke ill of me after this *fiasco*. Linley Gaveston, you are even more detestable than your father, consequently I bid you leave this house now; when you have satisfactorily settled matters with your affectionate 'Lola' you may acquaint me with the fact; but henceforth you do not approach my stepdaughter."

"You were particularly anxious once I should marry her," he began sullenly. When she interrupted sharply,—

"True! I am not blind to my own interests; but even if you were a free man I would not give Marjory into your keeping now, having found how vile you are. Roger, to you I will give no explanation of this man's words; you may trust me or not, just as you please; this I will, however, confess, I have schemed and lied to compass this marriage, just as much for my own benefit as for Marjory's welfare. Now I regret I severed her from an honourable gentleman, and I will do my best to repair the mischief—only send that scoundrel away—and remember, however deeply I have erred, I am your wife, and you cannot alter that fact."

She spoke so defiantly, looked so reckless that Roger Mortimer regarded her in amazement; she was so different to the woman he had best known—wife, sister, daughter—and as the scales fell from his eyes he said violently,—

"You have been in league with that devil all along; when I have settled accounts with him I shall have something to say to you also."

"I shall be ready to hear you," she answered with a mocking obedience, and glancing neither to the right nor left she went out. Then in his fury, wholly forgetful of the scandal he would cause, Roger Mortimer caught Linley by the throat; together they struggled a brief while then dragging him through the hall, the elder man flung him down the steps into the garden, leaving him cursing and swearing, but not valiant enough to retort in manly fashion.

Returning to the house Mr. Mortimer made his way to his wife's room, and a very stormy scene ensued. It ended by Lillias laying both slim hands upon his shoulders, whilst with a reckless laugh she said,—

"I am your wife, and you respectable English cannot lightly sever that tie; we manage things better in America—but I have done nothing to

shame you; I mean to keep the position I have won, and any attempts on your part to oust me from it will be futile. Do you think I married you for love? Poof! The man who could act as you did, concealing your attachment from those who should have been first in your regard was not likely to win either my love or esteem. I am not a good woman, but I appreciate goodness when it does not interfere with my plans."

Much more she said in the same strain, in the end succeeding in reducing Mr. Roger Mortimer to a state of submission.

Langbridge was fairly staggered by the news of the rupture between Marjory and Linley, the vulgar order saying,—

"Serve her right; what could she expect of a foreigner!" but when they heard she was very ill, they repented their harsh criticism, and cast the odium of it all upon Roger Mortimer and his "high-faluting wife."

Then Lilius did the kindest act she could under the circumstances—specially as it entailed humiliation to herself. She wrote Mrs. Comyn saying,—

"Marjory is ill, and in her delirium calls for you. She cannot (although unconscious) endure my presence; so if you can forgive and forget the past, you shall have no reason to complain of your reception."

It is hardly necessary to say that Alison Comyn answered that summons personally and with all possible speed.

Mr. Mortimer met her at the station in a somewhat sheepish fashion, for his conscience was not quite clear with regard to his treatment of her; and man-like he began to shift the blame of it all upon Lilius, but Mrs. Comyn was essentially just, and with a sharp,—

"That will do, Roger, don't play the part of Adam," effectually closed his lips.

She was certainly surprised at the warmth of Mrs. Mortimer's greeting, still more surprised to see her eyes fill with most unaccustomed tears as she spoke of Marjory.

"I am glad you are here," she said honestly enough, "for strange as it may seem to you, I love the child in my own queer fashion, and I would not have harm happen to her. I was instrumental in bringing about her betrothal to Gaveston, but I never dreamed he was such an utter cad, and I thought that like most girls she would quickly forget the old love. I believed, too, that my precious stepson would be good to her. I didn't take into consideration that vices like virtues are hereditary, and his father was a beast. There I've fairly shocked you now, one should always speak well of the dead, even if one has to lie to do it; but come upstairs now and see Marjory."

Poor little Marjory! she lay for days between life and death, knowing nothing that passed around, only it seemed to soothe her when her aunt's gentle touch rested on brow or head, or her tender kiss was imprinted upon cheek and lip.

At last they won her back from the very jaws of death, but she lay so weak and listless that the doctors looked grave and Aunt Alison shed many a tear.

"You must rouse yourself, Marjory," she said, "surely you are not grieving for such an unprincipled wretch as Linley Gaveston. I can never understand why you listened to his suit."

"I think I was mad, auntie, for I hated him all along; he never came near me without making me shudder. I see how wicked I have been, but I was smarting with a sense of—of—Roslyn's treachery, and I hardly cared what became of me—"

"Are you quite sure Mr. Howard was treacherous?"

"There can be no doubt of it; and I only want to die because nobody really needs me now, and I feel so forlorn, so desolate, I have not strength to cope with my illness. Oh, auntie, all my life is spoiled."

Lilius heard that, and stood a few moments in brooding thought, then with a little cynical smile she said to herself,—

"A little pitch more or less will not hurt me; and if the child prefers love and poverty to indif-

ference and wealth, I'll stand no more between her and her happiness."

Consequently that evening she announced her intention of going to town. Mr. Mortimer looked aghast, he was unable any longer to trust her, and was even unduly suspicious.

"Why should you go to town and alone?" he asked irately; she laughed as she answered,—

"I am going to right a wrong, and it is my firm conviction that Mr. Roslyn Howard will not only return with me, but will shortly carry Marjory away. Oh, it is no use to storm; you ought to know by this time it is absurd to oppose my will, and at least let me comfort myself with the reflection that once in my life I did a good action."

He forbore to argue the point with her, feeling how utterly useless it would be, and in the morning Mrs. Mortimer went to London.

She was not at all ashamed of her past conduct, and she met Roslyn with such an unembarrassed air that when he learned her errand he was fairly staggered.

Then suddenly his honest eyes blazed with anger, his face flushed, and his voice grew hoarse as he said,—

"You are a devil; I never can forgive you! and that you should stand here smiling over the evil you have wrought, the worse evil which Heaven in its mercy prevented, passes my comprehension. If you were a man—"

"You would kill me," mocked Lilius. "Your sex is fond of tall talk, but now, if you are wise, you will get leave of absence and return with me to Marjory and love. I'm not half so black as I'm painted; at least I have some good points, and as I am restoring you to happiness, you should really not be quite so hard upon me."

She lifted her eyes audaciously to his then—she was many years his senior, but he could realise at last what power she had once exercised, what power she still could exercise over men.

"Heart's dearest! it has been a bitter trial, and each has been sorely deceived, but I think that the lesson we have received will not be lost upon us; as perfect love casts out fear, so should it cast out all distrust. But Marjory, I will not have you remain here under that woman's care; she has done her best to spoil our lives—"

"And her best to redeem her faults; I am so happy, Roslyn, I can well afford to forgive her, and in her own strange way I think she is very fond of me. But—there! you need not frown—I am leaving for Chester with auntie as soon as I can be moved."

"So I have found you only to lose you again; but it shall not be for long. Mr. Mortimer has consented at last to our union, and if I cannot give you riches, at least I can give you a whole heart. Oh! foolish little woman to think any other could take your place in my life!"

She clung to him, her sweet face uplifted to meet his ardent kiss; for her all clouds were past, the sun shone once more in her sky, and as her lips met his she reverently thanked Heaven in her heart for all its goodness.

Two months later they were married; perhaps Marjory's only grief was that her father utterly refused to be present at the ceremony.

Mrs. Mortimer had written a somewhat sarcastic note in which she declined to be a witness to "another execution," but she atoned for her sharp words by a costly gift in the form of a gold bracelet set with sapphires, a relic of her former married days.

So Marjory entered her new life (never to know extreme wealth, although indeed Roslyn rose steadily from post to post until finally he was admitted as junior and working partner in the bank) she went to gladden both heart and home, to make the passing years so bright with her love and her tenderness, that husband and children alike "rose up and called her blessed."

Two years after her marriage Linley Gaveston died, not, however, without making such provision as lay in his power for his step-mother's future; and for all her apparently gentle ways, the second Mrs. Mortimer still rules her husband with a rod of iron.

THE END.

POOR LITTLE LINNET.

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CHAPTER V.

THE hall-door was open; the afternoon out-of-doors was still delightfully bright and warm. Linnet moved quietly across the hall.

"Irene," she whispered, "they are speaking of Derrick Bourdillon. Let us walk on together, you and I, and Mr. Noble can follow and overtake us. I want you, you know, to show me the way to Windywaste."

She caught up her hat, which she had left lying before luncheon on one of the tall-backed oaken chairs in the hall; and, without answering, but with a long-drawn quivering sigh, Irene Noble followed Linnet out.

"I haven't the least notion which way you came by," Linnet said, chattering on glibly herself because she knew instinctively that the heart of Irene was very full and heavy, "for you must remember that I am a stranger sojourning in a strange land. At present everything here is new to me."

And as she spoke Gordon Noble himself joined them.

"But you have pitched your tent amongst us for good now, I trust, Miss Lethbridge," said he, in his cheery way, walking on between his sister and Linnet, his late thoughtful and care-worn look vanishing before the magic of the fresh soft wind that was blowing in their faces. "I hope you do not mean to 'silently steal away,' like the Arabs in the poem, by-and-by, and give us no warning of your intention."

"That is so likely, is it not?" returned Linnet, with a rather grim little laugh, "considering that I have nowhere in the wide world to steal to, even supposing I should desire to go. But I hope I shall be too happy here at Dreadmere, ever to dream of wishing to follow the Arabs' example."

"I hope so too, dear," said Irene earnestly.

"It must be horribly disagreeable to have to lug one's tent and things from place to place, I have always thought," observed Gordon lightly.

"But the camels do all that in Arabia, surely!" said little Linnet seriously.

"Ah, I had forgotten the camels, of course," laughed Gordon Noble.

"And is this the nearest way to Windywaste?" asked Linnet then.

"Yes," he told her. "Soon you will see the house between the trees."

They had come by the broad and mossy track which took one past the cloisters and the ruined chapel, and now were far out into the park, amid the browsing cattle, leaving the fir avenue behind them.

"I will accompany you just a little farther," Linnet said to Irene, "and then I must hasten back—or the Countess, perhaps, will be uneasy at my absence."

"Oh, she knows that you are with us," put in Gordon, "so it is all right. Return, Miss Lethbridge, if you like, when we have shown you Windywaste."

So on they went together through the Abbey park, by a pathway that wound beneath the giant elms and beeches, and past the great smooth mere where the pike were splashing and the tame swans sailing.

At length they arrived at a running stream, with reeds and willows on either side of it, and a rustic bridge—scarcely more than a plank and rail—spanning the rippling water.

The house itself was only of moderate size, square and built of a dusky red-brick; a Georgian mansion evidently, where solidity and comfort were reckoned before elegance.

Nevertheless the square red house, with its attic windows blinking in the dull slate roof, had about it an air of home and homeliness that appealed directly to the heart of little Linnet.

It was all delightful, she thought, after the gloom and old-time grandeur of Dreadmere Abbey.

"And so that is Windywaste," said Linnet, quaintly, halting at the little bridge—"and your home, Mr. Noble?"

"Yes—Irene's home and mine," he answered, gently and proudly.

"Windywaste," mused Linnet, aloud. Then she added wonderingly,—

"What a harsh, rough-sounding name for such a pretty, sheltered place, Mr. Noble. I expected to see something totally different."

"And you like the place, then?" Gordon smiled.

"Oh, so much," exclaimed Linnet artlessly. "It is ever so much lighter and brighter-looking than the Abbey."

No; there were no dark elms and gloomy firs to cast their depressing shadow over Gordon Noble's home.

The undulating meadow land surrounding it was studded with beautiful chestnut trees; and the trim gardens, as has been said, were modern and faultlessly cultivated.

"Ah, but it would be vandalism indeed to attempt to modernise the Abbey," remarked Irene quietly. "The good old place is perfect as it stands. It would be a sin, Linnet, to alter a single stone of it."

And then Gordon himself put in, laughingly, not considering in the least as to the sense and interpretation his idle words might imply—and at the sound of his voice Linnet raised her brown eyes questioningly to his frank handsome face,—

"How very serious you are looking, Miss Lethbridge. Perhaps you are thinking that you would like to pitch your Arab's tent at Windywaste!"

"Gordon, my dear boy," exclaimed Irene rebukingly, her delicate lips twitching in spite of her, "what a terribly conceited thing to say."

"Oh, the Countess will think that I am lost!" cried Linnet suddenly and irreverently; and she deserted her companions forthwith and turned her face homeward. "I am forgetting her entirely. I had forgotten that I had strolled so far. Good bye."

Never would Linnet forget the expression that had flashed into Gordon Noble's dark blue eyes, nor the amused working of the corners of his lips beneath the tan moustache.

She nodded to the brother and sister as she sped away, and Irene in return waved her handkerchief, calling out in her winning way,—

"We shall see you, dear, to-morrow."

As for Gordon, he raised his hat, gazing after Linnet still with amusement in his eyes, laughter and contrition as it were struggling oddly together in their depths.

The great old elms and beeches, with their spreading branches so near to the sward, soon hid Linnet from their sight; and when she turned her head again, the tall reeds and willows upon the banks of the stream, and the two figures standing there on the pretty rustic bridge, were no longer visible to her eye.

She would have been unhappy—desperately miserable perhaps—had she not known so well that his speech was absolutely unpremeditated—a thoughtless speech of the moment simply, lacking either meaning or intent.

"How foolish of me to run away so unceremoniously," soliloquised Linnet, vexed and disgusted with herself now, so, growing more cool and collected, common sense told her she ought rightly to be. "But I must put it down to the Countess; and so it will not really matter, after all. Oh, dear me, I wish I were as beautiful as Irene Noble."

And thus ruminating, after an erratic fashion of her own, Linnet quickened her steps once more, and hastened back to the Abbey.

In the evening, after dinner, with the Countess's permission, Linnet explored Dreadmere Abbey from attic to cellar.

Mrs. Kidd was her guide and cicerone, and carried the light, pausing and wheezing at each short step, like an over-fed spaniel in the heat of July.

Several of the upper chambers had fallen into disuse, and were locked up, but Mrs. Kidd had not forgotten to bring the keys of them, which hung habitually on their respective nails in a corner of the housekeeper's parlour.

All the rooms were richly furnished, or rather they had been so once, both those that were now locked up and those that were not—particularly the apartments which were always reserved for Lord Bourdillon's especial comfort, the rooms

which were his own when he saw fit to sojourn for a while in the impoverished home of his ancestors.

And all, to Linnet's fancy, were more or less grim and ghostly, so tarnished were they with age and dark with heavy wainscoting, and silent with an oppressive, mournful sort of silence that seemed to breathe as it were of the years which were past and gone—long since dead and forgotten years, the very histories of which were likewise forgotten and lost in the past.

The shadows on the painted ceilings, which the lamp-light and the huge furniture made between them, were hideous and grotesque in the extreme, thought Linnet shudderingly; and some of those grand old chambers, moreover, smelt as Linnet told herself as tombs might smell, and were hung with dingy tapestry, wrought doubtless by careful, patient hands that had long ago crumbled into dust and nothingness beneath those weedy marble slabs in the ruined chapel—faded, melancholy-looking tapestry, from the close folds of which the moths flew out sometimes, attracted by the light of the night-lamp which Mrs. Kidd, half scared herself, held occasionally above her head.

And out of the once gay-patterned bed-furniture, all limp and deathly-quiet now as the tapestry itself, the moths flew out as well; and one with bead-black eyes, bolder and bigger than the rest, as though indignant at and resenting the unlooked-for intrusion, cast itself impetuously at Mrs. Kidd's nose, and then toppled over the wire netting of the lamp, and so headlong into the flame, perishing miserably before Linnet could rescue it, poor thing.

But the housekeeper declared that its destruction was a "good job"; for "them horrid moths was nasty things in bed-rooms, 'specially, too, where there was hangings and the like."

The few apartments in the Abbey that were in daily requisition, including Linnet's own and the beautiful long picture gallery, were better altogether.

The weird shadows on wall and ceiling appeared less grotesque and lifelike in outline; the atmosphere of them was of course not so mouldy-smelling; there was no ghostly-stirring tapestry; and no white moths with horrible shrimp-like eyes and powdery wings, to disturb from their silent revelling.

Exploring downstairs was infinitely livelier work, Linnet found, than exploring overhead; albeit some of the remoter regions were chill and cheerless enough, with their stone floors and bare colourless walls, which had served in the olden time—according to Mrs. Kidd—for the accommodation of the poorer and lowlier brethren when Dreadmere Abbey had been a home of Popish faith and creed.

"Indeed I have heard tell," said the dame to Linnet, "that every blessed floor downstairs here when this old house was a real monastery, was nothing in the world, missy, but cold bare comfortless pavement, until Earl Godwyn, the great-grandfather, or grand-uncle, I forget which, of—of—" dropping her voice mysteriously, and glancing half-affrightedly over her shoulder—"of the present Earl Derrick, pulled 'em all up, missy, and laid decent oak-planks down instead. Earl Godwyn—I showed you his pictur', Miss Linnet, just now in the gallery—was the last of the Catholics. All of the family, since his time, have been, or leastways have professed to be," corrected the old lady sadly, "upright respectable English Church-goers."

"And have you no portrait anywhere of Earl Derrick—the present Lord Bourdillon?" inquired Linnet, curiously.

"Oh no, missy, that we haven't—yet," answered Mrs. Kidd, under her breath. "And to speak the truth, Miss Linnet, I ain't at all particular if I never should see it hanging up yonder among the others. A sight of himself occasionally is quite enough for a poor old body, without nailing his pictur' up there on the wall, to remind one of his wickedness and evil living every time one happens to pass through the gallery, and 'specially on a wet winter's night, with the wind is howling and shrieking round this old place like a soul in outer darkness, and then sobbing away into silence like another in torment

and torture," said Mrs. Kidd, with a shiver that was very real.

And then, having seen and explored all that there was of interest to see and to explore, and also having duly thanked Mrs. Kidd for her goodness and her company, Linnet returned to the Countess, whom she had left in the shadowy old drawing-room.

She found Lady Bourdillon asleep, near one of the long painted windows, which was open, her white head draped as usual with the lovely old lace, her waxen hands crossed on her knees.

The candles in the sconces were lighted, the delicate china and silver urn stood upon a table close to the Countess, and the soft fragrant air of the twilight evening was wafted in over all.

"Godmother dearest," Linnet said gently, crossing over to her and putting her lips upon the silver-white hair, "you are sleeping in a draught. Let me close the window—the evening grows chilly now."

The Countess opened her dark eyes slowly, and Linnet perceived then that she must have wept herself to sleep—the signs of her having done so were unmistakable.

"Is it you then, Linnet? Have you come back to me!" said Lady Bourdillon, rousing herself and sitting upright. "What a long while you seem to have been away! Ah, I remember now! You have been going about the house with Mrs. Kidd. And now I suppose you are ready for your tea, my dear!"

"Yes, dear godmother," answered Linnet softly.

And as they seated themselves at the little table together, Linnet kissed the Countess again; for she divined well enough the reason of those tears, and was possessed of a vague sort of idea that she could not be too tender with her godmother.

Lady Bourdillon, Linnet knew, had been thinking and dreaming of her son.

CHAPTER VI.

UNFORTUNATELY the next morning Linnet was awakened early by the toothache; just such a racking, dragging, maddening toothache as that which, as a child, she had sometimes been a martyr to.

She left her bed, and looked in the glass, and saw too plainly that her face was swelling.

From past unhappy experience she knew that her cheek would swell a good deal more before the day was over; and the first distinct thought that flashed across her mind was,—

"Now this will prevent my dining at Windywaste with my godmother to-night! The Countess will have to go alone!"

The bare idea, to say nothing of the pain and the disfigurement, filled her eyes quickly.

Creeping back into bed again, Linnet indulged in a brief flood of tears, almost then forgetting the anguish she was enduring in trying to realise the disappointment she was destined to meet.

When Phoebe Slack brought the hot water into her dressing-room, Linnet called the maid to her bedside.

"I am afraid that I cannot rise just at present, Phoebe," she explained miserably. "I have an attack of faceache."

"So I can see, ma'am," said the stolid Phoebe.

"Will you please tell Lady Bourdillon how it is with me," begged Linnet, speaking as well as she could, "and ask her to be kind enough to send me up a little tea?"

"I will, ma'am. And anything with the tea—anything to eat!" suggested Phoebe.

"Oh, Phoebe, how can one eat," said Linnet piteously, "with a face like this!"

And she moaned aloud again, thinking of the evening and Windywaste.

The Countess was soon upstairs with Linnet, accompanied by Mrs. Kidd, who carried a little tray with a cup of strong tea on it.

Even before Linnet saw her, she knew that Mrs. Kidd was coming, for she could hear the old lady's wheezy breathing in the corridor.

together with the stately footfall of the Countess herself.

"There is just a *souppon* of cognac in it, Linnet, my dear," said the Countess kindly, as she took the cup and saucer from Mrs. Kidd's tray. "Drink it now whilst it is hot, and possibly it will bring you relief."

"Godmother dear," mumbled poor little Linnet, sitting up in bed disconsolately, with her cheek held in her hand, "I am sure that I shall never be fit to go with you this evening to Windy-waste—I am such an object! You will go without me, of course, should I find myself too great a fright by the evening to think of accompanying you!"

And with a gulp of the hot tea Linnet swallowed also the returning rebellious tears.

"Yes, I must indeed go, Linnet, whether you are able to accompany me or not," Lady Bourdillon answered sadly. "Gordon will not be over here at the Abbey to-day; he has business of his own which will keep him at home. As I desire particularly to see him, I must go to him at Windy-waste. By the evening, dear, let us hope, the swelling will have gone down."

Here Mrs. Kidd put in her opinion.

"It would go down fast enough and get better, I'll warrant, my lady," she pouted, "if missy would just wind her flannel-petticoat round and round her head, and then try to get another good sleep. There's nothing like it for the faceache, my lady; you mark my word."

"Some new flannel that I have would be the better remedy, I think, Linnet dear," Lady Bourdillon smiled kindly; and hastened noiselessly from the room.

"Not it, missy!" whispered Mrs. Kidd earnestly.

"By rights it should be the flannel-petticoat, as I said—indeed it should. Ask any wise old wife in Agglestone village, and she'd tell you the same thing, Miss Linnet. Her ladyship is wrong. New flannel—pooh!"

But all remedies and prescriptions were of no avail; sleep and freedom from pain were not for Linnet that day.

It was hopeless for Linnet to dream of dining out in the evening later on.

She must make up her mind to face and accept the inevitable, and remain at home at the Abbey.

And she told herself that she was a martyr indeed, and shed many a secret tear in her vexation and bitterness of spirit.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon—a gray lifeless sort of afternoon it was, with the pale morning sunshine gone; an afternoon by no means uncommon in late September, when the fields are in stubble, and "chill October" is drawing near—Linnet determined on getting up and dressing, notwithstanding the Countess's protestations to the contrary, and Mrs. Kidd's wheezy predictions as to increased neuralgia and additional inflammation accelerated by a probable cold.

But Linnet would remain idle in bed no longer. She would at any rate attain the melancholy satisfaction of witnessing the Countess, unaccompanied by her unfortunate self, drive off in the family chariot to Gordon Noble's home.

In that simple, silent old household at Dreadmere Abbey, the guise an invalid might elect to go about in was of little or no consequence to anyone.

So Linnet did not hesitate to descend to the dim and sad-looking library, in which apartment Lady Bourdillon was wont to sit and work of an afternoon, with her luckless face still bandaged in the Countess's new flannel, and with an antiquated black-silk flowered shawl, which had belonged to her mother, wound scarf-fashion about her shoulders.

The wind was rising outside in the park, the great elms were rustling and swaying and tossing their giant branches above the Abbey roof.

Every now and then the yellowing leaves were whirled earthward, scratching occasionally the Tudor windows as they fell.

By the bright andirons on the library hearth-place sat the Countess, her work for the moment thrown aside, her waxen mittened hands held out to the blazing logs.

Yes—clearly now the summer was overpast; the crackling wood seemed to proclaim the fact gleefully as the sparks in thousands went careering up the wide black chimney.

To Linnet, in her limp and depressed condition that cheery fire in the dim old library was a welcome sight indeed.

"Linnet," the Countess remarked soon, "I must dress now; because I wish to see Gordon as early as possible, and we have much to discuss before dinner. You must not think it unkind of me—this leaving you all alone, dear; you know as well as I do, Linnet, that my going is a matter of necessity and cannot be avoided. Believe me, dear child, I will return to you as soon as I can."

And Lady Bourdillon rose to her full height, and dropped her hands softly on Linnet's shoulders.

"Oh, yes, dear godmother, of course I understand—please say no more about it," Linnet entreated.

And she essayed a smile, which, poor child, changed speedily into a grimace of positive agony.

"Poor little soul," said Lady Bourdillon, pityingly.

Yet despite the sweet compassion in her stern, sorrowful eyes, the Countess smiled discernibly herself; and doubtless she could not help it; for Linnet was in truth a queer and sorry spectacle just then.

When Lady Bourdillon came downstairs, dressed plainly as usual in the trailing black satin gown, with the anowry lawn neckerchief falling softly and gracefully the V-shaped opening of the bodice, the hands of the hall clock were pointing to half-past four.

Wrapped round in a thick woollen shawl, something after the fashion of an Eastern mummy, Linnet thought, she took up her station at a hall window, and, with her young heart burdened heavily with discontent, watched the Countess pass out and step into the old family coach.

Linnet returned the parting nod of her godmother mirthlessly and ruefully enough, and her spirits sank even yet lower, with a strange, unaccountable kind of sinking, as the carriage vanished swiftly down the gray and cheerless avenue.

"Please give my love to Irene," she had said pitifully to the Countess before her departure, "and my kind regards to Mr. Noble. Tell them both how sorry I was that I was unable to accompany you to Windy-waste, dear godmother, and perhaps Irene herself will kindly come and see me to-morrow!"

The Countess had promised faithfully to deliver the message, and Linnet was somewhat consoled by the reflection that she would probably see her friend Irene Noble on the following day.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMEWHERE about seven o'clock—or it may have been later—as Linnet was sitting dispiritedly upon a footstool in front of the fire, listening absently to the dismal wind and the heavy rain-drops that were dashed occasionally against the mullioned panes—to the strong fierce gusts which every now and then would go shrieking and wailing through the deserted chapel aisle and cloisters—and, in reality, musing on many things, apart from Dreadmere Abbey, that lay far back in her girlhood's past, Mrs. Kidd came into the library, and her entrance was a welcome break on poor little Linnet's despondent loneliness.

"I looked in just to see how you was getting along, missy," said Mrs. Kidd, breathing hard.

"The pain is growing much easier, thank you. But oh, I am so dull in here all by myself! I wish, Mrs. Kidd, that you would come and sit with me, and bear me company for a while! And," said Linnet pleadingly, "let us have tea in here together, shall we?"

"That I will," answered Mrs. Kidd readily, with a benign fat smile; "for though I have tea'd already, I am good for another cup, missy, at any time. You mustn't mope alone no longer

—it's bad for you; so I'll just go and tell Phoebe to make it and bring it into us, if you'll excuse me, Miss Linnet, for a moment."

And thus it came about that Mrs. Kidd and Linnet drank their tea cozily together in the dim and faded old library of the Abbey, with a bright and crackling fire of pinewood on the ancient andirons, and the wind and the rain amid the roaring elms outside holding high festival in the murky autumn night.

And so the time passed on, Linnet still sitting on her lowly footstool, cup and saucer in hand, and leaning her shoulder against Mrs. Kidd's knee.

And how, presently, they came to speak of the ruined, forsaken chapel, Linnet hardly knew; but they had been talking of the long ago time when the Bourdillons had been followers of the Church of Rome, and this had led them on to speak of the chapel cloisters adjoining the eastern portion of the Abbey, of the dangerous condition of the decaying ruin, its forlorn and desolate appearance generally.

And then Linnet had happened to remark to her garrulous companion that, when looking upward towards the ruined belfry-room only on the previous day, Miss Noble of Windy-waste had actually shivered and turned her gaze shudderingly away from the pendant bell, visible through the bars, as though some bitter or painful memory had been awakened suddenly at the sight thereof.

"Of course it might have been only my fancy—Miss Noble herself told me that I was fanciful," said Linnet humbly.

But Mrs. Kidd drew a deep hard breath, and with a trembling hand set down her cup and saucer.

Bending over Linnet, she dropped her voice to a half-whispering key.

"No—it was no fancy of yours, missy. For that old black bell in the belfry, missy," said Mrs. Kidd, her wheezy voice becoming so low and frightened that the sobbing wind and pattering rain between them almost drowned all sound of it, "is known as the Bourdillon Knell—the Knell of the Bourdillons."

"Miss Noble shivered, as everyone else shivers, I dare say, when they remember its awful mystery."

"You see, they call it the Bourdillon Knell, Miss Linnet," said the old woman, trembling like a leaf in the storm outside, "because—because—because, before the death of any one of the family, true bred and born, or married, that bell has always been heard to toll, once, twice, thrice, and sometimes more than that."

"The legend runs that the last of the monks—who was a member of the Bourdillon race—was convinced, when he died, that it would always be so in the future after him; for, when on his death-bed, he heard the bell himself, with his own ears, tolling out mournfully as he lay."

"It was ascertained afterwards that no mortal living hand was the cause of it; and oh, Miss Linnet, dearie! the story goes on to say as how that holy man passed away from this life quietly, and at peace with all the world, with the sound of that ghostly old bell falling faintly on his ears to the last!"

"I know, missy, that all I'm telling you is as true as gospel; for I've heard the Bourdillon Knell once myself. And that was the night her ladyship's husband died—Earl Gregory that was—Earl Derrick's father."

"Lor! Miss Linnet, I crept like and curdled all over! Everyone of us in the household here heard it then, all except the Countess herself."

"SA! was mercifully spared the—"

"Gracious goodness!" gasped out poor little Linnet, when she found her voice, "gracious goodness, Mrs. Kidd, what a dreadful idea! But it must be all nonsense, surely!"

As well as she could, Mrs. Kidd looked dignified and sad.

"Tis no nonsense, missy," said she, "but a solemn fact; and facts are stubborn things, which you can't alter nohow. And I was just about to tell you, when you stopped me, that an old person, down in Agglestone village, as I used to know intimate when I was a lass myself and scullery



"LOR', MISS LINNET, I CREEPT LIKE AND CURDLED ALL OVER AT THE SOUND!" EXCLAIMED MRS. KIDD.

maid here at the Abbey—she had the misluck to hear that bell amongst the ivy in the ruin toll out a death-warrant, as she called it, three or four times during her long life. And she was ninety-five when she died, was Margaret Hobbs. She used often to tell us about—"

But Linnet, all incredulous still, interrupted again.

"Mrs. Kidd," said she, impressively and conclusively, "someone must have been on the spot to pull the cord."

Once more did Mrs. Kidd essay a smile of dignity and sorrow.

"For the last two hundred years, Miss Linnet," said she, "there has been no cord to pull. That old black bell has just hung there of itself like; the rope under the belfry-room having rotted away and fallen nobody can tell where."

"Missy, I say—there has been never a rope, and yet that bell has been heard to toll, to toll in the dead of night, too, when no living soul has been near the ruined chapel—and for the best of all reasons, which is that at that time nobody would have the courage to venture there. For they do say that a dead abbot walks," said Mrs. Kidd mysteriously.

"Oh pooh!" said little Linnet stoutly. "Then it must have been the owls, Mrs. Kidd."

"I don't believe the nasty things are ever seen hereabout," said Mrs. Kidd flatly, in reply.

And then a silence fell on them both.

The rough wet wind cried and moaned, and then sobbed piteously in the chimney.

The log fire still leaped and crackled cheerily, but the candles in their antique sconces were burning rather low.

Suddenly the stillness was broken rudely by an impatient and furious knocking at the massive hall door—a continued knocking that echoed ominously, not to say deafeningly, throughout the gloomy old mansion, followed by a like furious ringing at the clanging bell.

Mrs. Kidd turned pale.

Linnet sprang up from her low seat by the hearth, pale and trembling likewise.

"Who can it be at this hour!" they cried simultaneously. There were no men-servants in the house at the time. There were but two now kept at the Abbey—coachman and footman—and they had gone with the Countess to Windywaste.

It was their custom to remain there, the journey being a long way round by the public road, until her ladyship was ready to return; the men being well looked after in the servants' hall, and the horses the same in the Windywaste stables.

"Who in the world can it be!" breathed Linnet again, as the tremendous knocking and ringing were repeated. "Have you no idea, Mrs. Kidd?"

But Mrs. Kidd could only shake her head apprehensively, fearing even to hazard a guess.

Soon Phoebe Slack appeared on the library threshold, scared out of her habitual stolidity, as Linnet had seen her once before.

Linnet trembled anew when she remembered the occasion.

"Will you go to the door, aunt, or—or shall I?" asked Phoebe, with white lips.

Mrs. Kidd hesitated for a few seconds only. Her dignity and superior courage, were, as it were, at stake, and she seemed to know and feel that it was so.

"Why, I will go, Phoebe," she panted, trying her utmost to look brave. "What a coward you are—what is there, I should like to know, to be afraid of, girl?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Phoebe, dropping involuntarily into a chair.

Linnet herself stood quivering by the table, one small brown hand bearing heavily upon it.

Phoebe lingered helplessly, partly out of terror, partly from curiosity.

Linnet's heart beat with a nameless fear and dread; but the old housekeeper had already crossed the dim Gothic hall to the massive entrance door, and was calling out in shrill and shaky tones,—

"Who's there, please?"

Then Linnet heard above the wind a loud

hoarse voice giving utterance to strong, unholy language, savouring of deep curses that chilled her very blood.

And then in a trice Mrs. Kidd had loosened and let down the heavy bar of the door, as though her movements had been quickened suddenly by electricity, and the great door itself sped backward into the hall, letting in a violent gust of the wet night air.

With the rough blast, that flickered all the lights, a few damp leaves rustled scratchily in too; and then, with quick impatient strides, the tall, heavily-coated figure of a man stepped forward haughtily into the light.

Mrs. Kidd curtsied, Linnet could see. As for Phoebe Slack, she, uttering a stifled sort of cry, had fled—Linnet knew not whither.

Then Mrs. Kidd, in her agitation, let the ponderous door slam to.

The hollow reverberating echoes died away, and the man spoke.

"Why the deuce did you not let me in before?" he demanded.

Only Linnet noticed that he did not say "deuce" exactly.

However, he waited for neither reply nor explanation of any sort, but came striding on towards the light in the library.

Mrs. Kidd followed humbly in his wake; waiting possibly for further orders.

That room in which Linnet Lethbridge stood trembling by the table was almost in a direct line with the hall door of the Abbey.

And onward he came swiftly—advancing—advancing—looking neither to the right nor to the left; she stood there, spell-bound, so to say, immediately in front of him.

Yes, at last!—she knew it!

Face to face at last with Derrick Bourdillon, the "black Earl," whom she so greatly feared, and believed she hated for his sins.

Instinctively Linnet knew that it was he—the poor Countess's reprobate son!

(To be continued.)



"ETTA IS ENGAGED TO BOB, AND HE WANTS TO BE MARRIED IN SEPTEMBER," SAID BETTY, BY WAY OF EXPLANATION.

STEPCHILDREN OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER II.

BOB did not go all the way back to Barton with Etta. Perhaps he felt it was Mr. Stuart's due to hear of the engagement at once, perhaps he realized that in a crowded suburban train there would be little chance of a *tête-à-tête*, so he walked with his little *fiancée* along Tooley-street to London Bridge, saw her safely through the barrier to the Barton train, and then went back to Ashley Green as proud and happy as though some wonderful gift had come to him, instead of the half-reluctant promise of a penniless girl.

He stopped before the old house in Church-street, and paused a moment before he knocked at the door. He had known that house ever since he came to London a boy of eight. He had seen its fellows on either side change tenants, had watched the whole district go down apace, for the smarter people who yet lingered in the neighbourhood much preferred the monster block of flats the other side of the church. Haughty buildings had every modern improvement. The old houses in Church-street had nothing up to date about them, only they were rich in history, and in associations, for those whose memory could look back long enough.

Number fifty-five was a square, compact, double-fronted house with a door in the middle, and a sitting-room on either side. The left hand had been sacred to scholastic purposes for something like a century. Mr. Stuart's grandfather had kept a school there and flourished. His father had kept a school there and barely made a living, and the third proprietor of the establishment had fallen on such evil times that he had handed over the pupils to his eldest girl, and taken a situation as a clerk till his eyesight failed. Now he was almost blind and did very little to bring grit to the mill, his two children, Betty and Jack, putting their shoulders loyally

to the wheel, and just managing by a hard struggle to keep out of debt.

There was nothing new about No. 55. The many panes of the small ugly windows were all of one size and shape. The lower ones had hideous outside shutters, a dull chocolate brown shade, as though there was something very valuable inside to be guarded from thieves, which certainly had not been the case within Mr. Dawson's memory; but an attempt had been made to make the old place homelike. Two pots of carefully cherished spring flowers bloomed in one of the windows, and a little bird hopped merrily about in the cage between them. Bob knocked, and then waited patiently. The Stuarts kept no regular servant, and this often led to considerable delay before visitors gained admittance. It was Betty who opened the door. Betty with a brightness in her eyes as she noticed the gladness written on the young man's face.

"Oh, Bob, is it all right?"

He might feel angry sometimes that the blind man preferred Elizabeth to her sister; but in Betty's presence he always felt she was a true loyal-hearted woman.

"It is quite right," he answered, with a glad ring in his voice. "I have come to see your father about it."

She led the way into the parlour, a quaint old room, panelled half-way up in dark brown, the furniture was in horsehair. The round table was covered by a hideous magenta cloth; but a picture of Etta hung over the mantelpiece, and that alone would have made the room charming to the young surgeon.

"Ha, Bob," said the blindman, dropping his work (both Mr. Stuart and his sister were always to be found knitting in the evening). It was a fatal mistake to inquire for what purpose this work was destined. Dawson knew perfectly the Stuarts earned a trifle by knitting for a large warehouse in the City; but it would have hurt their pride terribly to have their secret discovered. It was a harmless fiction that they

could not bear to be idle, and Bob humoured them in it.

"Ha, Bob!" repeated the ex-schoolmaster. "I didn't expect to see you to-night. Have you come for a game of backgammon?"

"Not exactly, sir," Bob wished that Miss Stuart in her stiff black dress and prim lace cap had not been seated the other side of the table, it was so much harder to speak before Aunt Mary. "The fact is I had something rather important to tell you."

Miss Stuart put on her spectacles, and stared steadily at Bob.

"I can go away if your business is a secret," she said in rather an injured tone; "though I have given up my whole life to my brother and his children I don't expect civility from their friends."

"I hope I am your friend too," said poor Bob, feeling completely at a loss, "and my business is no secret. I only wished to tell her father that I proposed to Etta to-night."

"You proposed to Etta," repeated James Stuart, with a little pause between each word; "rather sudden, wasn't it, Robert?"

"I have loved her for years, and now I am to be a partner, in September, I thought I might venture. Of course I ought, perhaps, to have spoken to you first, but I have so few chances of seeing Etta now, that—"

"That you could not miss one!" said the blind man. "Well, Bob, I suppose the child said 'yes,' or you'd not be here."

"She said 'yes,' and I've come now, Mr. Stuart, to ask your consent, and—all that."

"Rather late in the day," said Aunt Mary, sharply; "but then we are poor, and so must expect to be slighted."

"Come, come, Mary," said the blind man, "there's no slight meant. I suppose you know your own mind, Bob?"

"Yes, sir."

"It would do no good if I told you Etta was only a little butterfly, and not fitted to be a poor man's wife."

"I hope I shall not be a poor man always, sir; I'm quite content with Etta as she is, and if you will only consent to our marriage, I shall be the happiest man in London!"

"I have no right to refuse," said James Stuart, sadly; "a blind man, who can't even give his children a home, has no power over them."

"Don't say that, father," pleaded Elizabeth; "you are the best father in the world, and we would never do anything to vex you."

"I hoped this would not vex you, Mr. Stuart," said Bob in rather a hurt tone; "I used to think you liked me."

"There's no one outside my own family I like better," said the blind man, heartily. "I'm very glad of anything that will give me the right to be proud of you, Bob; only the child is young. Are you quite sure she knows her own mind?"

"She is twenty," objected Bob; "heaps of girls marry at twenty, nowadays; she will be twenty-one before our wedding, even if, as I hope, you consent to give her to me in September."

"I'll consent, if she does," said Mr. Stuart, almost solemnly. "I don't believe in long engagements, Bob, if they can possibly be avoided."

Mr. Dawson left soon after that, and when the door had closed on him Elizabeth crept up to her own room to write a few lines of tender congratulation to Etta. But the two who were left in the parlour did not go on with their knitting, they sat for a few minutes in a painful perplexed silence, then Mary Stuart crossed to her brother's side and laid one hand on his shoulder.

"I've been afraid of this always, Jim; for twenty years and more I've dreaded this."

The blind man sighed.

"Could I have done differently, Mary; I've known Bob the best part of his life! There's not a better fellow going."

"And he deserves a better fate."

"Well, he wouldn't have listened to a word against the girl; and, Mary, I do think sometimes we are a little hard on Etta."

"She is a wilful, idle coquette," snapped Aunt Mary, "and she'll break Bob's heart before she's done with him."

"I hope not. It's May, now; she had better come home at once, particularly if the wedding is to be in September."

"It won't be," snapped the spinster.

"I wish he had chosen Elizabeth," said the blind man; "but there's no controlling these things. Etta was bound to have lovers; I only wish it had not been poor Bob."

"I think you should have told him."

"I may tell him yet before the wedding; but I passed my word I'd keep the secret till Etta came of age. It's been a heavy burden on us, Mary, but a promise is a promise."

"If Bessie had lived it would have been easier," confessed the old maid; "she would have had more patience with the girl's fancies."

"Well, write to Etta to-morrow, and tell her to give whatever notice Mrs. Wilson requires, and come home at once. I'd rather she was with us while this was going on."

"It's a long while since there was any love-making in this old house," said Aunt Mary, grimly. "You and Bessie were the last lovers in it."

"Well, our love story was happy enough; let us hope Etta's will be the same."

"It's more likely to be my sister Etty's story over again," snapped Aunt Mary, "and that was bad enough; but I blame Geoffrey most, he ought to have married her out of hand, and never have let her go to France."

"I wonder what became of Geoff," said the blind man sadly; "he might have written in all these years."

Miss Stuart shook her head.

"He never had any proper pride. He was only half a Stuart, you see, brother. I expect he grew reckless after he lost Etta, and just 'went under.'"

It was a short expressive term "went under," but it meant a great deal. James Stuart had seen a great many men "go under" in his time. It simply meant that the waves of trouble which beset their path were too deep for them to resist, and they sank beneath them.

Elizabeth heard her brother come in, and went to meet him in the hall, for the shabby old house had a hall many a spick-and-span suburban villa might have envied.

"Let's go for a walk till supper time, Jack, if you're not tired."

"I'm not tired, but it's getting late, Betty."

"Never mind for once, I want to talk to you."

Down towards the river the brother and sister turned their way. The water possessed a strange fascination for Elizabeth Stuart. She loved to stand and watch the boats pass by, and look at the big ships with their tall masts.

This dull unfashionable part of London was full of interest to her. It was so full of life.

Betty used to make up stories of the people who passed her by, and her favourite thing of all was on a summer night to stand and watch the lights spring up on the great bridge they could just discern in the distance.

Jack was like Betty, fair and straight and tall. Etta, with her *petite* figure and foreign vivacious prettiness, had little in common with the other two. Jack was twenty-four, but looked younger, though the battle of life pressed on him hardly. He was just a City clerk, nothing more. There seemed little chance of his ever being more, and his salary was just—ninety pounds a year.

"What's wrong, Betty?" he asked suddenly; "has Etta thrown up her situation. I should never be surprised, she grumbles so."

"No, but father means her to give notice; she is engaged to Bob, and he wants to be married in September."

"Poor Bob," said Jack feelingly.

"You are hard on Etta," said Elizabeth, reprovingly, "you are, indeed."

"My dear, Betty, have you ever read 'Undine,' I had to learn German, though precious little good it has done me. 'Undine' was the book I had to construe, and I came to the conclusion at once, our pretty sister was just like Undine—before she found her soul."

"Please, don't," said Betty sadly.

"It's true," said Jack, "but perhaps Bob will help her to find it, only I'm puzzled. I thought, somehow, our sister was ambitious and would go in for wealth and grandeur, instead of love."

"Love is best," said Elizabeth half dreamily in a low tone, but not too low for her brother to catch the words.

"Yes, love is best," he answered slowly, "but oh, Betty, money will do a great deal in this world."

"You would like to be rich, Jack."

It was not a question but an assertion. Jack Stuart looked out riverwards almost as though he could see some strange story written beneath those dark waters.

"I think sometimes, Betty, I'd sell my soul just to be rich; just to have the gold men worship so; just to be free from these petty haunting cares; these miserable pinchings and scrapings."

"That's not like you, Jack," said the girl simply; then in a lower key, "have you seen her again?"

"Yes," said the lad gloomily. Jack Stuart was little more than a lad despite his twenty-four years and his intimate acquaintance with poverty, "I saw her again to-day; she passed so close to me, Betty, I could have put out my hand, and touched her dress, and yet she's as far above me as the stars in heaven."

Betty put one hand on his arm in the darkness in silent sympathy, she could not find words to comfort him; she knew so well just what he felt. He was a clerk at ninety pounds a year; he might never have any more. A blind father and an old aunt were well nigh dependent on him. What was the use of his longing after a home of his own; of his dreaming of love and marriage, even if he had had the prudence to fix his heart on a girl in his own sphere; but alas! Jack had aimed high indeed. He had dared to love the only daughter of his employer, and he said truly, Beryl Hunter was as far above him as the stars in Heaven.

"If it wasn't for the governor and you, old girl, I'd enlist," Jack said after a long, long pause.

"If I got into a regiment ordered for foreign ser-

vice, perhaps I shouldn't feel the pain quite so bad; but to live here and never have a shilling to spend on pleasure or amusement, to feel the grind of poverty at every turn, to be the shabbiest clerk in Hunter's office—why, Betty, it takes the heart out of a man."

It did, indeed, she knew it, poor child, she looked up into the blue vault of Heaven, at the star-spangled sky, and her heart ached just as Jack's did; she wanted so little to make her happy, a few books, a few glimpses of pleasant things, the power to pay her way without the endless anxiety to make both ends meet. It wasn't much to ask of Fortune, but it seemed more than that hard step-dame was willing to grant.

"It's worse for father," she said, gravely.

"Is it?" asked Jack, "I'm not so sure; he lives in the past, dear old chap; he thinks of the dead and gone glories of the family, and congratulates himself on having good blood in his veins if he's precious little else. I fancy, to that we keep well and don't do anything disgraceful, he doesn't mind what happens much to him; the years he has to live are just a waiting time and each one that passes he checks off in his mind as a milestone bringing him nearer to mother."

"He loved her?"

"Yes; I fancy, Betty, it was the losing her took the heart out of him. If she had lived, I don't believe he would have drifted down hill, he'd have made more of a fight with adversity if only he had had anything left to fight for."

"Bob thinks his blindness might be cured."

"I've always thought so myself," returned Jack, "but he won't hear of going to a hospital. I started the subject, myself, once, and he told me the Stuarts were not paupers."

"Would it cost very much, Jack?"

"A famous oculist would charge at least two guineas for an opinion; then, an operation would cost ever so much."

"I should like to have the opinion."

"I'm afraid even two guineas would be hard to come by, Betty, and the operation (if necessary) would be beyond our best efforts, unless you found a gold mine."

A long long silence.

"Do you think it could be done for twenty-pounds?"

"Well—perhaps it might, especially as that good fellow, Bob, would help us, regarding us as friends and future kindred of his own. But, Betty, my dear, twenty pounds means nearly a quarter of my salary and two-thirds of your school profits."

"But I've got a scheme, Jack, I really have; you won't like it. I don't, either, but we won't mind if it's to bring back father's sight."

And the scheme was this: in Mrs. Stuart's time No. 55 Church street had boasted a drawing room, when Aunt Mary became presiding genius of the house, this room fell into disuse. She declared the children would spoil it when they were little, and later on argued that two sitting rooms were enough for anyone. They had their meals in the parlour, and if they wanted to read or work, there was the school-room out of lesson hours. For twenty years the drawing-room had been kept in a state of glorified repose, and the bed-room at the rear had been deserted because Mr. Stuart preferred to sleep at the front, and no one else liked to be alone on the first floor. Betty's scheme was that these two rooms should be let to a quiet lodger.

"We've more than a year to stay here."

"Thirteen months," agreed Jack, "but you'll never get the governor to consent. Aunt Mary will tell him it's not genteel to let lodgings."

"She loves father better than her gentility, she will consent for his sake. If I got ten shillings a week for the rooms, in about nine months I should have twenty pounds."

"The rooms wouldn't let, Betty, people prefer smart new flats like Hanover Buildings, our old place would have no chance."

"I mean to try," said Elizabeth, naively, "and Jack, you must be on my side and try to persuade Aunt Mary to consent."

"Wait till Etta comes home," said Jack, laughing, "she will be furious at your plan and Aunt

Mary will give in just for the sake of spiting her."

"Jack."

"My dear Betty, isn't it true? hasn't it been war to the knife between Aunt Mary and Etta ever since we can remember?"

"I am afraid both she and father like me better than Etta, but—"

"You may tack on another fear, Betty, I like you far and away better than our youngest."

"But why?" asked Betty, in a strangely puzzled tone. "Etta is so pretty and clever."

"But there's no heart in her," objected Jack, "and somehow she never seems to belong to us really, if I believed in fairy lore I should be inclined to fancy our youngest was a changeling. I wish Bob joy of her, that's all; he was a fool not to choose you, and yet, Betty, I really don't know how any of us would have got on without you."

And that brotherly assurance was very sweet to Elizabeth Stuart, who had reached the mature age of twenty-two without the vestige of a lover.

As they walked slowly back towards Ashley Green, they did not notice that a woman who had been listening to their conversation by the river followed them stealthily. She was careful to escape observation, but she never once lost sight of them, and she cowered under the shadow of the wall as they knocked at 55 Church-street.

"I thought as much," muttered the poor creature to herself as the door closed on them, and she continued her way slowly in the darkness. "Jim has kept his word, I knew he would; it was a bitter sacrifice but I'm glad I made it for her sake."

The "sacrifice" referred to had cost others years of self-denial and much patient suffering, but the woman did not think of that. She had been selfish long ago in the hey-day of her beauty and she was selfish still, when trouble, disappointment, suffering and sin had left their marks on her and destroyed her good looks.

CHAPTER III.

ETTA STUART caught her train, but Bob's wooing must have agitated her more than she was aware of, for instead of getting into that portion which was detached at a small local junction and thence ran direct to Barton, she took a seat in the first third-class carriage she came to without inquiry, and never noticed her mistake until after congratulating herself on a far shorter wait than usual at the before mentioned junction, she found to her dismay at the next stopping place that she was at a station she had never heard of before, and had most evidently come wrong.

She jumped out at once, and anxiously asked a porter what she was to do next.

"Barton, Miss! You should have changed at the last station. There's a train back to the junction in thirty-five minutes, then if you wait an hour and a half you'll get another to Barton."

"But I shouldn't be home till past ten," said Etta in dismay, remembering her leave of absence was only till half-past eight.

"No, Miss, you wouldn't. Barton's only a matter of two miles from here; if you go across the park you'd walk it in half an hour."

But it was eight, and though the almanacs declare the sun does not set till eight at the end of May, it would be dusk before Etta reached her destination, and a country walk in an unknown district did not appeal to the town-bred girl.

She was thinking of going back to the junction and throwing herself on Mrs. Wilson's mercy for her delay, when a voice near her said courteously—

"I am going to Barton, and I shall be most happy to drive you there if you will allow me to do so."

Etta Stuart looked up. The speaker was a handsome, well-dressed man, a little under thirty, a gentleman in looks and manners.

The girl was romantic to a degree, and a once thought herself in for a pleasant adventure

In books governesses always met handsome strangers who rescued them in their danger, and became veritable friends in need, but Etta's own experience at Mrs. Wilson's had been so terribly prosaic, she had almost given up expecting such lucky chances to happen to her.

"I should be very much obliged to you," she said gratefully. "I ought to have changed at the last station, but did not know I was in the wrong part of the train."

"I've made the same mistake myself before now," said the stranger, frankly, "and I know how annoying it is. I am only too pleased to be of any use to you."

Outside the station a high dog-cart was waiting in charge of a boy groom. Etta did not see a silver coin pass from master to servant, or hear the former say coolly,—

"You can tell them at home I missed the train and you left the mare at the hotel."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Bertram, but the master told me most particular I was to wait till you came."

"By George!" said Bertram, with a look of amazement, "then you'd better jump up behind, and remember, you need not say at The Firs that I found Barton the nearest route home."

"Right sir," and the boy stood at the mare's head while Kenneth Bertram assisted Etta to her place, and sprang up beside her. Then the small groom climbed into the back seat, folded his arms, and was apparently deaf and blind to the doings of the pair in front.

There is honour among thieves. Dick had Mr. Bertram's florin in his pocket, and it bound him to silence at The Firs, but could not prevent his wondering who in the world was the pretty young lady at the gentleman's side.

Etta Stuart had never in her life been on a dog-cart before. A hansom-cab was the grandest carriage she had ever enjoyed, and she could count her drives in those on her fingers, poor little thing. After penny tramways and third-class journeys, there was something very charming in flying through the air like this.

"Is it very far to Barton?" she ventured to ask presently.

"It's not half so far as I could wish," he said gently; "three miles by the road to the Market Square. What part of Barton did you want?"

"Park Road, Mr. Wilson's."

"I know Wilson very well," said Kenneth cheerfully, "and his wife, too; but you can't be one of his daughters. I thought they were all children."

"I am their governess."

"Oh," then under his breath. "Poor little thing."

Etta caught the words, but did not feel inclined to resent them. His voice was so low and musical, they do not teach etiquette at Ashley Green, and Etta had not the innate refinement which would have made Elizabeth resent such advances from a stranger.

"Have you ever been to the Wilson's before," he asked, "or is this your first arrival?"

"Oh no, I have lived there since January. I went home to spend the afternoon to-day."

"Only one afternoon! Mrs. Wilson looks a Tartar."

"She is very cold and distant," said Etta, who was always happy when launched on a grievance, "she never seems to remember I am young."

"And pretty," put in Mr. Bertram, "but I expect she does remember that, and that is why she keeps you in seclusion, for I have been at Park House two or three times this year, and yet I have never met you, Miss—"

"My name is Stuart. Henrietta Stuart."

"After a royal princess of great beauty," said Kenneth, "let us hope you will have a happier fate than that ill-fated lady."

Although a governess, history was not Etta's strong point. Mr. Bertram prompted her memory.

"She was very beautiful, and her husband poisoned her because he was jealous of her."

"Yes! It's a comfort people don't do such things now."

"Don't do what, Miss Stuart! I am quite

certain people are beautiful still, and I don't think jealousy is done away with quite."

"You are laughing at me."

"I would not for the world—I see Park Road in the distance. I hope that we shall meet again, Miss Stuart. I do not want this to be the end of our acquaintance."

They had slackened pace now. Kenneth intended his fair passenger to alight at the corner of the road, for reasons of his own, he had no desire to stop at the solicitor's door. Etta was quick to take the hint.

"I will get out here, please, and oh, thank you very much indeed, Mr. Bertram."

The boy-groom alighted and went to the mare's head. Kenneth sprang to the ground and handed Etta down with ready care.

They were standing full under the glare of a gas-lamp, and she saw for the first time that her escort was not only young and faultlessly attired, but decidedly handsome. He had fair curly hair of a bright golden tint, good clearly cut features and violet eyes. Etta had never in all her life seen a face so attractive; she thought of Bob with his rugged features, long straight hair, and general air of indifference to toilet and fashion, and she felt that fate had been very unkind to her. Why could it not have sent her a lover like Mr. Bertram, instead of poor good-natured Bob.

Kenneth held the little hand in his for a moment. This girl was very pretty, he decided, and there was about her a strange, fascinating grace rarely met with. Why should he not see more of her! What harm could come of their spending a few pleasant hours together in the coming summer!

"I hope we shall meet again," he said in a low voice. "Miss Stuart, don't you ever go out alone these long evenings when the children are in bed?"

"I never care to," she said gravely, "it is so dull."

"But there are such pretty walks about Barton," went on Kenneth persuasively; "there's the park, you know, and the public footpath across it that leads to Chislehurst; you won't find anything prettier than that within twenty miles of London, especially just now when the chestnuts are in bloom."

He spoke in a low tone, chiefly because of the small groom, but Etta imagined the soft musical accents were in that subdued key, because of his great earnestness.

She was flattered and elated at his notice, he was so different from everyone she had ever known, and so she yielded. She allowed Mr. Bertram to plan a meeting for the following Sunday afternoon, and then she went on to her house of bondage, as she called the Wilsons', with a strange fluttering at her heart which had nothing to do with the fact that she had promised to marry Bob Dawson.

As Lancelot Underwood had told Mr. Bertram, David Wilson was tolerably well off, and lived in a substantial red brick house, but Lance had forgotten that seven children cost money, particularly when they come to an age to be educated. To the seven little Wilsons of the lawyer's first marriage were now added two by his second, and the worthy lawyer really had his work cut out to provide for them all, while Lena, instead of leading the life of careless ease she had anticipated, found she had to be a far more busy person than in her maiden days.

She had forsaken Lance because she wearied of the waiting, because, she argued, if twelve months seemed so endless how could she bear three or four years. She liked Mr. Wilson very well, and she had known him a long while, his two eldest children were boys and could be despatched to school, a good nurse would relieve her of the three little girls and the twin babies, she would really have a very good time and be far happier than waiting for Kenneth and bearing in the eyes of all her acquaintances (for the engagement was a private one) the reproach of not having a lover.

Things did not turn out quite as she expected. Mr. Wilson would only send the boys to school on her agreeing to teach the three little girls herself. Then, when her own babies arrived and this became impossible, he allowed her to engage

a nursery governess, but gave her such a very limited sum for everything, that if she had not done a considerable amount of needlework herself, and looked very closely after the servants to prevent waste and extravagance, she could never have managed at all.

Mr. Wilson was dining with a bachelor client on this particular evening, and Lena had been indulging in a regular fit of the blues. She had made a mistake, she told herself, she had far better have waited for Lance. She was nothing better than a housekeeper now, an unpaid drudge to another woman's children.

Perhaps the key to these discontented thoughts was that she had met Margaret Underwood that afternoon and had a long talk with her; the old intimacy between the families had survived the blow of the broken engagement, and though they did not see very much of each other, the two girls spoke when they met; the Underwoods had grown to think it a very good thing for Lance that Lena had been faithless, but it was not in human nature that Margaret should not boast a little of her brother's good fortune when she spoke of his visit.

"He is to be in England six months or longer, if necessary, and, as he is to undertake some inquiries for the firm, his salary will be paid just the same. Fancy, dear old Lance with a thousand a year, and he only twenty seven!"

"He has been, very lucky," said Lena, coldly, conscious that her husband's income did not nearly reach that figure, and that his seven children had to share it as well as her own babies. "I suppose he will settle in Africa for good, now."

"I don't know, he wanted mother and me to go out and pay him a visit instead of his coming here, but of course we would much rather have him at home."

And it was this Lena thought of during her long, lonely evening, and somehow, she felt more utterly miserable than she had ever done in her life before, and she longed so for a little companionship that when she heard a ring at the bell, and guessed it was the children's governess returning, she went out into the hall, resolved to invite Miss Stuart to share her evening meal, for, in the master's absence the late dinner had been dispensed with.

Etta fully expected a scolding for being late, so the kind words were an extra treat to her.

"Let Mary take your hat, Miss Stuart, and come and have supper with me. I am all alone to-night, and shall be glad of your company."

Etta felt story books must be right after all, since two of the incidents related in them had happened to herself in one hour. She followed Mrs. Wilson into the cosy, brightly lighted sanctum that was so different from the shabby school-room, and said involuntarily,—

"Oh what a pretty room, I don't think I ever was in here before."

"Mr. Wilson had it fitted up for me when I came home," said Lena, "of course I can't let the children sit in it, or it would soon be spoilt. Did you have a pleasant afternoon, Miss Stuart?"

"Yes, thank you," said Etta, with a vivid blush as she thought of the evening which had been far pleasanter than the afternoon; "my sister was delighted to see me."

"You have only one sister, I think," said Mrs. Wilson, trying to take an interest in her governess' relations. "Is she anything like you?"

"Oh no, not a scrap. Elizabeth is tall and fair, and very quiet and good."

Lena smiled.

"Do you mean you are not good, Miss Stuart?"

"Well, I don't think I am," said Etta, frankly. "I have been discontented ever since I can remember. You see, Mrs. Wilson, we are just a little poorer than the proverbial church mouse, and I do so long after pleasure and pretty things."

Etta looked so pretty as she spoke that Lena half sighed. This girl seemed just a copy of herself as she had been seven years before. She had been poor and longed for luxury, she had wearied of a dull, poverty-stricken home, and longed for a wider life, and what was the result? She had broken her plighted troth and married a

prosaic, middle-aged man fifteen years her senior, just because she had not the faith and patience to wait and trust her lover.

Etta began to fancy she had offended Mrs. Wilson from the latter's long silence, and she said, penitently,—

"I know it's wrong to be discontented, but when one is young one *does* feel things so."

"I know," said Lena, kindly; "I think you wonderfully patient considering. Why, one afternoon of those children wears me out, and you are with them day after day; but, Miss Stuart, you are very pretty. Don't colour up like that, I expect you know it perfectly, all girls do; and men will do a great deal for prettiness. Some of those days you will find someone only too willing to give you all sorts of pleasure and luxury if you will only let him put a gold ring on your left hand."

"You mean that I shall marry a rich man?" said Etta, in amazement.

"I don't see why you shouldn't," replied Lena, kindly; "and if you will take a piece of advice from an old married woman, don't be in a hurry to tie yourself down; youth is the time for enjoyment, Miss Stuart, and it is the greatest mistake a girl can make to marry too soon, or,"—and her voice took a sad ring—"or to marry the wrong man."

"I don't think," said Miss Stuart, with extreme frankness, "I should care to marry at all if only I were rich myself."

Mrs. Wilson smiled.

"You don't understand life, child, or you wouldn't talk like that, but don't be in a hurry; even if you are romantic enough to believe in love, wait till you meet a man you would give up the whole world for. If you are of a practical turn and marry for money, make sure your husband has enough to gratify your ambition. As society is now, married people needn't see much of each other, if only they are rich enough each to go their own way; it's the middle course where they don't care for each other, and are yet yoked together in one small house that makes life intolerable."

Was she thinking of herself, Etta half thought so.

"It is very strange you should talk to me like this to-night," said the governess, looking at Mrs. Wilson with an entreating expression in her brilliant black eyes, "because to-day somebody asked me to marry him."

"And you didn't care for him," said Lena, gravely.

"How can you think so? I like him very much."

The married woman smiled.

"My dear, if you loved him you wouldn't speak of him in that calm, matter-of-fact way; and if you loved him you wouldn't tell me you liked him very much."

"I have known him so long, and he is very good," said Etta, dreamily. "At home they all think he is a great deal too good for me, and that I am a very lucky girl, but he is poor—he always will be poor; he couldn't give me pretty things, and I am so tired of being poor."

"Then don't marry him," said Mrs. Wilson, decidedly; "you cannot love him, or you would not think so much of his poverty; if you took him, it would be just for the sake of a home."

"I suppose so."

"Then don't do it; marry a man you love so well you would be content to follow him to the end of the world, or live on a desert island for his sake, and very likely you will be happy even if you work hard all your days; or marry a man you don't care a jot for, because he can make you rich, and it may turn out all right, but don't try and do without both love and money. You must have one or the other in plenty, child, or your married life will be a failure."

It was the advice of a worldly practical woman, but there was a ring of truth about it.

And as she tossed about through the long hours of that summer night unable to sleep from excitement, two things came slowly home to Henrietta Stuart—Mrs. Wilson's theory was right, and her own promise to Bob Dawson was a great mistake.

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—(continued.)

"I SHALL expect to see you often," she continued, softly. "I shall never forget that it was you who saved my life, Mr. Loraine. I never think of that dreadful policeman without shivering; and, besides, we are old friends—are we not?"

"You were on the eve of release, at any rate," he answered, "although you did not know it. You have nothing to thank me for, I can assure you," he added in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I want you to tell me one thing—one thing that no one will answer, and I look to you to keep nothing from me. If—you know what I mean—was found out. Letty thinks it wrong to speak of it. Perhaps she is afraid that I shall go mad again. Who was it? I must know," she asked, looking at him steadfastly.

Mr. Loraine would have much preferred not to be asked this critical question, but since it was asked, and asked so imperatively, he felt bound to make the best answer he could.

"It was one who was not responsible," he said, after a pause; "one who was insane. It was—I don't know how to tell you—it was—Madame Bert."

Pauline buried her face in her hands for some seconds in silence. At last she found speech.

"Oh!" she gasped, "I might have known it—have guessed it!"

"Her mother died in a madhouse, and she has, it now appears, been more or less mad all her life. At times, you might see the light of madness in her eyes. She was not responsible always for her actions, and latterly her disease developed into the most dangerous of all forms of homicidal mania."

"And Philip was her only victim?" said Pauline, faltering painfully.

"Yes, but others had a narrow escape—so it appeared on the trial, for, of course, her counsel moved heaven and earth to prove insanity, and he had a surprisingly easy task. It seems that once she nearly murdered her maid. The woman was abroad when it happened, was heavily pensioned, and the whole thing hushed up, but it had to be brought to light at last to save her life."

"And what did she do?" inquired Pauline, with a white face.

"She was angry with the woman about something, but had smothered her wrath, and when she went to bed, and the maid came as usual to undress her, Madame locked the door, put the key in her pocket, and said to the horrified abigail: 'Now, say your prayers, for I am going to kill you before I go to bed,' and, to show her intention was as good as her word; she produced a long knife which she commenced to sharpen up and down on the back of a large book."

"Yes," exclaimed his listener, faintly, every nerve vibrating as she listened to this ghastly tale.

"You can imagine the girl's feelings. She glanced at the bell-ropes. They were both tied up. Her only chance was by means of a small closet full of china that stood close to the head of the four-poster, and close to this she fell on her knees, and was there commanded by her mistress to say her prayers aloud that she might know when she had finished."

"The miserable woman faltered out her prayers very slowly, you may be certain, and gradually, with one hand turning the handle of the door beside her; but mad people are cunning, as you know. She was seen in the glass by Madame, who was still busy with the knife, and who instantly sprang on the bed, with the howl of a maniac."

"The maid, fortunately, had the presence of mind to snatch up the nearest pillow, which saved her somewhat, and holding it well between her and her mistress, she backed into the china-closet, and dashed a quantity of china through the window, and screamed for help, which barely came in time, for Madame had followed her closely, and despite of the pillow, had stabbed

her savagely in several places, and no effort could wrest the knife from her grasp.

"She was as strong as mad people always are. When this came out she was acquitted, as a matter of course."

"And where is she now?" faltered Pauline.

"In an asylum, where she is to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure, which will be for life. She is incurable—hopelessly insane."

"Someone told me that he saw her lately, an awful spectacle, in one of the stone yards, her yellow hair—not yellow now, but brown—drawn in a tangled mass straight down over her face like a veil, creeping up and down—up and down one side of the yard in one ceaseless monotonous walk, like a wild beast in a cage."

"How shocking!" ejaculated Pauline. "I know what that is like! I have seen the same," shuddering. "Poor creature! But who can pity her? I can't. The best wish I can give her is that she was dead."

"Now you know all, Lady Curzon. There is nothing kept back from you. We need never speak on the subject again, need we?"

To this she acceded by giving him her hand, and echoing the word never.

"It is a dreadful, dreadful picture! Let us turn its face to the wall."

Shortly afterwards they themselves turned their faces homewards, and Mr. Lorraine took his departure.

The two widowed friends travelled about together for a whole year.

Far too long a time to please Count De Bodisco, who was waiting impatient to be "settled"; and then they established themselves in a fine old family mansion thirty miles south of London, which Lady Curzon found was really what it professed to be per advertisement—"standing in a well-wooded park, containing all the requisites of a gentleman's establishment, was roomy, luxuriously furnished, close to church and station, and commanded splendid views of the surrounding country."

The Count De Bodisco was in the Russian capital when the two ladies and one child and large retinue of servants, horses, and carriages arrived to take up their abode at Glenlea Manor; so Mr. Lorraine had the entire field to himself, and was not a man to let slip such an opportunity, and found his way down to Glenlea as frequently as he could without making his intentions too conspicuous.

Sir Philip was dead now more than eighteen months.

His widow had put off her weeds and wore white and very becoming morning dress, and grey and lavender gowns.

She had recovered her spirits, her looks, and her hair.

She was only five-and-twenty. Why should she not take another husband and tempt the lottery of fate a second time? Why should she not marry him?

He had long looked upon her as the only woman in the world who would have suited him as a wife, and now why should not his dream be realised?

Pauline cared for him—he was sure that she did, else why did she blush when she saw him?

Why had their easy, unembarrassed friendship given way to curious, inexplicable restraint? Why had their unembarrassed relations given way to a wall of reserve?

Pauline could not understand it, and felt troubled and bewildered. What did it mean?

Mr. Lorraine found a chance one day of putting his thoughts into speech—a chance occasioned by Mrs. Letty being called elsewhere, and he and Pauline being left to pace the broad garden walk alone.

He did not say much, but he made his meaning understood, and Pauline was considerably startled and agitated.

"I—my last was not fortunate, you know. I should never—no I never will marry again. I was too unhappy!" she stammered.

"I will make you forget all that," said her companion, decidedly. "Whatever my faults may be, Pauline, and no doubt I have plenty, I

am constant. You will believe that. Once with me is always—for ever!"

"Yes, I'm sure of that," she murmured, pulling up a sprig of lavender from the bush before her and dragging it to pieces as she spoke.

"Tell me honestly, Pauline," he said, "do you care for me? Do you believe that I care for you—that I can make you happy? Is it of yourself you are uncertain, or of me?"

To this she made no reply beyond becoming of a colour that put the red roses in the front of her dress to shame.

"And, one word, Pauline. Ever since I first saw you sitting in the window in Lady Farrington's drawing-room I felt attracted toward you in spite of myself and everything. I said to myself, now if I had had my own way—if my hands had been free—if I were a rich man, and could do as I please, that is the girl I should like to woo and marry. But it was not to be. The mere idea I knew was utter folly. I was a married man, and you were far above a mere secretary. You married my patron, and I did not go to his wedding—from no ill-will to him, or envy, believe that, but I knew him so well. I doubted his disposition, and I could not stand among the crowd of friends and offer what I knew would be but hollow congratulations. But the past is past; we have done with it for ever. What we have to deal with is the present and the future. Pauline, I ask you to spend your future with me!"

"Oscar," she stammered at last, and speaking with evident emotion. "I do like you! I have always trusted you. You have always been my friend. There is no one in the world I care for so much as you. I hope it is not wrong to say so. But it is too soon to talk of these things yet."

"Will it be too soon to talk of these things in three months' time?"

For an answer she merely shook her head.

"In six months' time! Answer me, Pauline. Do not condemn me to tortures of uncertainty. In six months' time may I speak?"

"Perhaps so," she returned, reluctantly.

"And what is to become of me during those six months? Pauline, you were not wont to be so selfish. What good can this waiting be to anyone? I fear of all to the dead."

"It is at least a mark of respect," she said, coldly.

Hot words rose to Mr. Lorraine's lips, but he choked them back manfully.

What good to tell her that when her husband believed himself to be a widower her dead lord had not hesitated to engage himself ere six moons had sped. How had he even shown respect to this tall, young, tragic-eyed, divinity now standing beside the big lavender bush?

"I shall go away, then, Pauline, until the time is up when I may speak. I have long promised a friend of mine to join him in a shooting trip to India. He starts next month. I shall accompany him, and return, I hope, next spring. I will be silent. I will patiently endure my exile if I have some reward to look forward to."

"Very well," said Pauline, becoming a shade paler. "It is not for me to interfere with your plans. I think it will be for the best. Remember; I have made no promise."

"One would think you were discussing the fate of empires, or settling all the affairs of the nation," said Letty, coming suddenly round the corner of a neighbouring walk. "That stupid Carson only called me in to say that the fish-monger had not sent any fish. I am sure that we can all dine without it for once in our lives."

"To see her face when I went in I fully expected to hear of a death in the family at the very, very least, and it was nothing but a disappointment about soles. Now, pray what have you two been talking about whilst I have been away?" looking beamingly from one to the other, as she spoke.

"Oh, about India," replied the gentleman, with great presence of mind. "About India and travelling."

"About India! What can you have to say about that horrid country that always calls up visions of scorpions, and cobras, and cholera?" she echoed, in a tone of amused contempt.

"I've merely been telling Lady Curzon that I am going there very shortly on a six months' shooting trip," he returned, with complete composure.

Mrs. Denham gave a little involuntary start and looked at her friend dubiously. She did not seem to care a pin—no more than if he had announced that he was going across the Park.

Crash down came a pretty castle in the air that the lively Letty had amused herself in raising during idle moments.

She had not expected to be a tenant of the Manor for life. She was convinced that Pauline would not be permitted to remain single, and Mr. Lorraine (the gentleman now standing on the walk twirling a rose in his fingers) was, in her own opinion, all she could desire for Pauline's second husband.

He had money, brains, good looks. Perhaps he might be masterful, but she was sure that he would make his wife happy, and certainly he was not likely to be such a butterfly partner as the late Sir Philip.

But Pauline, she remarked lately, had rather avoided him than otherwise, and her behaviour at the present moment was discouraging to the most sanguine lover or lover's friend.

She was actually gathering flowers and humming a tune to herself with a nonchalance that her friend found not only rude, but irritating, as she herself, with frank ejaculations of regret, turned away, and invited Mr. Lorraine "to come and look at the bees."

Had the sharp-eyed little lady looked a little closer she would have noticed that Pauline's bouquet was gathered very much at haphazard, that many of the poor flowers had barely any stalks, and that as Pauline followed them slowly along the walk she was biting her lips in a very suspicious manner, and that there was more than a suspicion of tears in her proud, dark eyes.

Mr. Lorraine did receive one word of comfort before he sailed.

He came down to take leave of the two ladies the night before he embarked; and Mrs. Denham (for reasons best known to herself) left the drawing-room for a liberal ten minutes just before he said "good-bye."

"Pauline," exclaimed Mr. Lorraine, as the door closed, "you will write to me, won't you? Promise me that you will."

"No—no," answering, bending her head over her embroidery. "I think not. Besides, you will be always moving about. The time will pass very quickly," she added, with sudden compunction.

"To you no doubt," he answered, with ill-concealed sarcasm. "Pauline, are you not going to give me one word to live on. Whilst I am away who knows what may happen. Life is uncertain. We may never meet again."

"Oh, do not say that, Oscar," she cried, suddenly rising and throwing down her work. "Do not think that I do not feel this parting, for I do"—tears starting to her eyes—"but it is right that we should wait. But, oh! Oscar, you might have waited at home."

"Too late to think of that now. Give me some word or token to carry beyond the sea that may act as a charm against misfortune."

"Take this," drawing off a small onyx ring, "and come back to me safely," she said, holding out the gift with a trembling hand. "Believe that I care only for you, Oscar; that as long as I live it will always be the same. I will never be anyone's wife but yours, but I will enter into no marriage again in haste. I must have time, in justice to myself and you."

"And that is a promise!" he said, taking her hand in his.

"Yes, a promise," she returned, "that I shall never break."

"And I may now look upon you as my affianced wife?" he said, stooping his head, and impressing a kiss on the hand that trembled in his own. "Your happiness will be my care."

A sudden peal at the bell brought them back

to everyday matters. It was Mr. Loraine's fly to drive him to the station.

"I will say good-bye to you here," he added, hurriedly. "Good-bye, Pauline! Heaven bless you! and don't forget me!" were his last words.

"Farewell," she said, in a faltering voice; "your happiness is mine!" and then motioning him away, turned her back that he might not see her tears.

She remained alone, still standing under the chandelier, possessed with an insane impulse, could she have spoken, to call him back and bid him stay.

He opened the door and went out into the hall, confronting Mrs. Denham's sympathetic face, who would have given a good deal, she remarked to herself, as she listened to his rapidly-departing banon crunching the gravel on the drive, to know if he had said anything.

She wondered much, and on what terms the two had parted she wondered still more; but as far as she received any hint or clue from either of the parties her mind was fated to be left in Wonderland.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WELCOME the coming, speed the parting guest," is a motto we have all heard, and Mr. Loraine had hardly reached the Suez Canal, ere the Count de Bodisco was once more back framing himself in the window of his London club.

Naturally he was not long in looking up the pretty widow—extremely pretty—and much improved he found her.

In his opinion she was far better-looking now than the unformed, unsophisticated girl he had first beheld in the character of Curson's *fiancée*, the romantic "Cinderella."

She had all the aplomb and dignity necessary for the high position to which he was going to invite her.

She was strikingly beautiful, she was intelligent her disposition was plastic—had she not been a very "Griselda" to an exceedingly trying husband?—and, better than all, she was exceedingly rich.

The fruit was already to be picked, and he set about making it his own in the following manner:—

He had come down to lunch and spent what he called "a cosy afternoon," and was sitting out in a cosy rustic chair, close to his hostess, on a smooth lawn below the dining-room windows.

He was languidly puffing a permitted cigarette, and gazing through his half-shut eyes with a glance of pure beatification, and much in the same way as a half-sleep pussy watches the approach of a nice, fat, young, unconscious mouse.

Lady Curson, in her soft white gown, and her big garden hat, and with her pretty little fingers glancing about among knitting needles, was his mouse.

"I wanted to ask you a question," she said, suddenly looking up, "which I could not ask before Letty. You have come from Russia quite recently, and, of course, have all the news?" significantly.

"What news—what can I tell you?" he answered, looking at her curiously.

"News—tidings of my Aunt Nathalie, of course," replied Pauline, impulsively.

"Yes," he returned, suddenly opening his eyes to their fullest extent, "there is news. She is alive and well."

"And nothing more—no chance of her release?" replied Pauline, in a tone of the deepest disappointment. "You know, Count, you promised me your good offices, and I told you to spare nothing that money could do."

"Yes, and I fulfilled your commands, and have now to tell you that the release of Nathalie Dormanoff depends entirely on one person," flicking his cigar with a careless, steady finger.

"And that person is, of course, the Emperor?"

"No, it is a lady."

"I cannot imagine who you mean," she answered slowly.

"I mean yourself."

"I! Then this is one way of telling me that she is free," cried Pauline, overcome with joy, and nearly crying with agitation. "Oh, you good, kind Count, how can I ever thank you! Where is she? take me to her at once."

"You jump too quickly to conclusions, my dear Countess. She is still in Siberia," repeated the Count, composedly.

This was a shock, Pauline's bright colour, and sparkling eyes underwent a change, and she sat looking at her companion for some seconds in indignant silence.

"Certain papers in my possession," he said, after a pause, "that I have got hold of at great peril to myself will free her, but I can only let them go from me on one condition," looking full at Pauline. "Nothing for nothing is my motto."

"And what is your—your price," she gasped.

The answer came in two words,—

"Your hand," making a gallant effort, despite of the knitting needles, to raise that member to his lips. "I adore you, Pauline; and you, I hope, are not totally averse to me. Listen," he added, impetuously, "don't speak yet—a moment. I am a Russian, like your grandfather. I belong to the same secret society as yourself, our friends are identical, our plans, our life's business the same. Your grand aunt would have wished it, and it will strengthen the 'cause.'"

"No, no!" cried Pauline, who had not had the smallest suspicion of the Count's intentions till this afternoon, and who actually quailed beneath his gaze. "Do not say anything now. It is impossible—impossible!"

"No!" returned Bodisco, looking at her, earnestly, "it is not impossible. Do you not—see what lies in your power! Think of the blessing you can confer upon her who is your nearest relation. Your aunt sacrificed all for her country! Are you to be outdone?"

She made no reply, but he saw that she was trembling.

"I know your secret. I know what has taken place during my absence, but it must be trampled down and crushed! You must devote yourself, your fortune, and your heart, to the cause and me. The great Russian property should be restored to Russia. In common justice you should marry a Russian, and the council of the society will never permit you to alienate your fortune and to give yourself to a miserable low-born secretary."

There was a bitterness and a malignancy in his accent that threw a new light upon his character.

She moved her chair back a few inches and looked at him with frightened eyes and undisguised uneasiness.

"You will marry me, Pauline, for two reasons," he said, in a softer key. "Not only, because it is a wise step for you to take, and because it will release your aunt from her years of hopeless toil, but also because I love you, and it is my most cherished wish to make you my wife."

He moved towards her as he spoke, but she put up her hands with a gesture of violent refusal, and said,—

"No; it is impossible. What you say can never be! I see you would compel me by threats—by fear! Would you have a wife who not only feared, but hated you?"

Bodisco looked at her with a strange, enigmatic smile, but made no immediate reply. At last he said,—

"You think only of yourself—of your fancies for this dark-eyed Englishman! Have you not had enough of Englishmen? And as for him, do you imagine he would stoop to marry you if a whisper were wafted into his ear?"

"What whisper?" she stammered, with a chill misgiving.

"Merely that the Countess Pauline was a sworn member of the secret society that strikes terror into the bravest, from the felon in his prison to the Czar upon his throne! And then your aunt—think of her. She may be rescued through you. Your own peace, her

safety, perhaps her life, depends on your decision."

"Why should not you, who are a sworn member of the society for which she has sacrificed all but life, free her of your own accord?" said Pauline, passionately. "Would you barter her liberty for my hand? Would you be so base? Have you no sense of chivalry or honour?" she demanded, rising and facing him, imperiously.

"For the sense you mean, none!" he answered, with the utmost composure.

Pauline was only the miserable fish struggling in the water. He would land her yet. But to be firm, her sense of duty, her sense of pity for her mother's unfortunate sister, were, he well knew, the line that would bring her to his feet sooner or later.

"To marry without love, is a crime," she said, at last, as if speaking to herself.

"Is this your last word? Is this my answer?" asked Bodisco.

"It is," she returned, proudly. "My aunt would not take liberty bought at such a price!"

And here she would have left him, but by an abrupt gesture he prevented her escape.

"Lady Curson, I do not accept your refusal. I am not a man to waver in a purpose deliberately formed. You will think over the matter. You will reflect at leisure and in cooler moments, and you will yield!"

"I shall never yield, Count de Bodisco! Will you be so good as to permit me to pass!" and, leaving her knitting in her empty chair, Pauline walked up the slopes, abandoning the Count to his own society and his own thoughts.

"I've been too abrupt—too sudden, perhaps—too rough on her!" he said to himself, thoughtfully, as he rolled a cigarette slowly between his fingers. "That fellow made hay when my back was turned. I was foolish to go. Never mind," he added with a complacent shrug, "although she is so proud and so indignant now, she will marry me yet, and I will pay her out by-and-by for all her little airs and graces. Ah, ah! *ma belle Pauline*, you are in my power, and you know it!"

The world seemed reeling to Pauline as she walked towards the horse.

The man she had just quitted, with his cynicism, unscrupulousness, and menaces, impressed her imagination with an air of unreality; he and his utterances seemed positively too bad to be true.

Was she never to be free—free to do as she would with her life and her money? Ah! this money! Were she poor, she instinctively felt that she would be beneath Bodisco's notice.

Day after day went by, and he did not appear again, and Pauline passed the time in debating with herself, and making and (within the same hour) breaking wild contradictory resolves.

At one moment she was determined to marry Bodisco and release her aunt. What happiness could she ever know if she had not compassed her release, according to her solemn promise to her dying aunt—her oath! What description of man could Bodisco be to drive such a wretched bargain!

"All is fair in love and war," he had once told her was one of his favourite mottoes, and he was resolved to act upon it to the letter. Then if she gave her hand to Bodisco she broke her promise to Oscar—Oscar, to whom so many of her thoughts went daily.

But a chill misgiving laid its icy hand on her heart.

Would Oscar marry her when Bodisco told him her secret?

Might she not thus lose both—her aunt's release and her own happiness! Oh, why, why had she sent Oscar Loraine from her! What foolish scruples—what madness had possessed her!

In the end, after many conflicting battles—after many sleepless nights—after being awayed one way by love, another by duty, one way by remorse, another by fear, she reduced herself to the lowest physical and mental condition, and in that state accorded the Count an interview, meaning to say no.

Alas, for her resolution! He went from the house her betrothed husband. So vividly had he

painted the horrors of Siberia, so cunningly played on her tender heart, so lavishly promised a home with them for her aunt that she was forced to submit.

She would sacrifice herself and Oscar.

"I know you think me an abominable wretch to buy you at such a price, Pauline," said the Count, in soft, wooing tones, "but it is my only chance. I promise, faithfully, to make you the best of husbands, and you will say yes!"

"Yes," she faltered, "but there are conditions," turning on him an ashen face. "It is not to take place for six months!"

"Oh! impossible!" he remonstrated, aghast.

"Not for six months!" she reiterated, her voice ringing in clear tones through the room. "And the day before the wedding you will place the papers in my possession, unless," moved with a sudden impulse of entreaty, and stretching out both her hands to him, piteously, "you will be generous and release her now. Oh! think—think of twenty years of exile; far from all friends and country! Will you not shorten the period and have pity!"

"It lies with you. Marry me to-morrow, and she is free!" he replied. "The matter is in your own power!"

"How can you torture me like this!" cried Pauline, in anguish. "Have I not yielded enough? Six months is little enough to save out of my whole life!" she added, covering her face with her hands.

"Then it will be in six months—no sooner!" said the Count, in a tone of sharp interrogation.

"In six months—no sooner!" she echoed, taking her hands from her face and looking at him strangely.

"She was not going mad, was she?" he asked himself, nervously, as he gazed into her countenance so woefully altered with the last ten days—pale, rigid, tragic in its intensity. It was that of a woman hunted and pressed hard by fate.

What had changed her thus? No one knew but himself, although the change had been noted critically, and commented on by the whole of the household.

Why was that expression of stern determination upon her lips! Whence that languid look in her despairing eyes! No one could tell.

But the mystery was solved one autumn day, when she abruptly sought her friend Letty and said, in a strange, hard voice,—

"Letty, I am going to marry the Count De Bodisco in six months' time!"

It was worse, then, than Letty in her wildest surmises had imagined.

Letting fall her book with a bang on the floor, she could find nothing to articulate but a pol-parrot sentence, "The Count De Bodisco! the Count De Bodisco!" And judging by her present countenance she was anything but a happy fiancée.

Meanwhile the Count was rolling back to town with a smile on his face, a cigar between his teeth.

The rich versts of corn-land bordering the Volga were presenting themselves to his mind's eye; the celebrated mines on the Dormanoff estate were also before his vision; the palace in St. Petersburg would be opened to society once more that very winter; and with a thought to his white-faced betrothed, he said to himself, with a smile, "All was fair in love and war."

CHAPTER XL.

AND thus, in spite of herself, Pauline Curzon became engaged to Ivan De Bodisco.

Fate had been too strong for her—fate and the Count combined.

She loathed the prospective marriage. She looked forward to it and Oscar's return with a shrinking apprehension but too well founded. Every morning, as it rose, brought this dreaded crisis one day nearer; and, oh! with what different feelings she had once counted the days. Then they had seemed leaden-footed, now they went at express speed.

As yet it was her hour. She kept Count De Bodisco well at a distance.

He was admitted to none of a lover's privileges. Once a fortnight he came to a stiff little dinner, where he was never the only guest, and where Pauline was never for a moment alone in his society.

He brought her the only gifts she would accept, flowers; and—had he but known—the instant he had departed his voluntary offerings were thrown out of the window, into the grate, anywhere to be out of sight.

If the donor would only remain out of sight and could have been put aside as easily, what would Pauline not have given—her whole fortune.

And now the six months have passed, and Oscar Loraine, punctual to the day, tanned with Eastern suns, brimming over with eager anticipations, is landing at Southampton—almost the first passenger ashore.

He has not had a line from Pauline, nor has he ventured to write to her. He trusts her fully, as fully as if he had had a line from her regularly by every mail, or as if she was even awaiting him on the jetty.

What gifts, what strange Oriental treasures has he not collected—figuratively—to lay at her feet; delicate gold and silver ornaments, diamonds, rings of quaint setting, silks, photographs ivory carvings, and three splendid tiger skins, his own trophies, brought from that expedition in the Terai, where he was subsequently laid up with jungle fever so severe that, as the station surgeon remarked, "it was just touch-and-go if he ever pulled through, and it was as likely as not he would leave his bones in India."

But of this Pauline need never know. He had returned, alive and well, to demand the fulfilment of her promise.

He came home in spring, when London was crammed, and going first to his club he was welcomed by many friends, who eagerly inquired what kind of sport he had had, just as if he had been away for three days among Norfolk turnips, and obligingly plied him with all the latest news—the smashes, the successes, the political situation, the recent scandals, &c., to all of which Loraine lent a ready enough ear as he stood with his back to the fire in the smoking-room, telling himself inwardly that he could not possibly go down to the Manor to-night, but first thing to-morrow morning.

How surprised she would be, or would she—did she not expect him!

"By-the-way, Loraine," said a hearty voice from behind the *Times*. "You remember Curzon's widow?"

Remember her! He gave a slight involuntary start, and before he had time to answer, his friend quickly continued, being very anxious to post him up properly, in all the gossip of the day,—

"You know there was a queer story about her—lunatic asylum, or something! A Russian fellow made himself very busy in that affair—Bodisco, a clean-shaven, clever, deep kind of little fellow. You have seen him, eh?"

"Yes," assented the other. "I have seen him. Never wish to see him again," he mentally added.

"He is always after the widow. She is uncommonly handsome, quite young, and has heaps of coin, so he knows what he is about. She is something quite out of the common."

"Yes," assented Mr. Loraine, with a look of suppressed anxiety and veiled expectancy.

"He told me yesterday that they were to be married in three weeks, and asked me to the wedding," said the newsmonger, complacently.

His listener gazed at him with steady eyes, and asked, in an equally unflinching voice,—

"Are you quite sure that it is Lady Curzon, that there is no mistake?"

"Not the smallest, my dear fellow," he answered, boisterously. "No doubt when she knows you are in town you will get a card of invitation too. You used to be a friend of the family, though query if a widow cares to see her first husband's friends at her second marriage, eh?"

The end of the sentence was entirely lost on Loraine, who felt for a moment as if he were going to die.

All the blood seemed to have forsaken his

heart, every sound and sense seemed swallowed up in one awful gulf of unfathomable darkness.

"Loraine, old chap, you look very seedy," exclaimed the latest speaker, laying down his *Times*, and surveying him with dismay. "What's the matter! Have a whiskey and soda, or something, will you? You had really better."

"Nothing—nothing's the matter," replied the other, rather wildly. "It's the effects of jungle fever—comes off and on quite suddenly—caught it in the Terai. Nothing worth noticing," snatching up his hat, and immediately taking his departure with curious haste.

"Jungle fever!" exclaimed a man, leaning back in his chair in the window, and watching Loraine hurrying down the club steps. "That's one way of naming it certainly; but it's not so easy to throw dust in one's eyes. The shock came on when he heard about the Russian's piece of luck—nasty, underhand, crafty-looking, little beggar, that Bodisco. I never liked him, and I should call this seizure of Loraine's an affection of the heart, with which Lady Curzon has a good deal to do."

As Oscar Loraine dashed into Piccadilly almost the first person he ran up against was the Count—on the principle of "talk of an angel and you hear his wings"—the Count and—could he believe his eyes?—Pauline.

They did not notice him till he had passed, and one glance showed him the Russian's complacent, pussy-cat countenance, and Pauline pale but composed, and looking handsomer than ever, dressed in black.

He stepped involuntarily and accosted them, taking off his hat, and making some incoherent greeting lost in his moustache. He looked straight into her face, and now that his eyes rested on her with more than a passing glance he was shocked at the change which six months had wrought in her appearance. Handsome she was as ever, but pale as a ghost, and as her dilated eyes rested upon him she looked more like a petrified human figure than a living woman.

The Count was the only person equal to the occasion. With a bland smile and a silky voice he said,—

"This is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Loraine. When did you come back to England?"

"This morning."

"Ah, then probably you may not have heard of one piece of news," he returned, with a significant smile at his unhappy companion.

"I have been quite out of the world for a long time," replied Mr. Loraine, who had now become endued with a kind of desperate composure.

"Lady Curzon is to become the Countess De Bodisco in three weeks' time. I shall be the happiest of men. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the wedding."

Pauline suddenly raised her eyes and looked at him with such a look of untold anguish, of such sad entreaty, of such speaking intelligence, that he was almost startled out of his cool self-repression.

The thin curtain of polite conventionality was all but torn aside to reveal the flame of fury, and jealousy, and unutterable scorn that was actually devouring him internally.

But that glance spoke volumes—spoke more than Pauline dreamt of. That gaze had told him the truth.

Whatever had led her to be false to her promise, it was not her heart. She loved him still—she had always loved him.

To the Count he replied in civilly icy terms "that he was afraid that his engagements were so numerous he could not promise to do himself the honour of being present at the ceremony, but that he begged to offer his congratulations on the happy occasion," and, with a bow and sweep of his hat, he wished them both "good afternoon," and walked on.

"He took it very well," said the Count, after a pause, looking slyly at Pauline as he spoke, out of the corner of his cold grey eye.

Pauline made no reply. She knew that appearances were deceitful, and that from what she knew of Oscar, from many years of experience, she had not done with or seen the last of him.

He would not be satisfied with the bare plain

fact so excellently and so abruptly broken to him by the triumphant Count. He would come to her later on for the reason.

Pauline and Letty had been spending two days in London—partly to “do” the Academy and pictures of the season, and partly for shopping—that relaxation of which no woman ever tires, and it was thus that Pauline had come face to face with her old friend and lover in the middle of Piccadilly.

Little did passers-by guess at the life-drama that was being played in their very midst upon that public thoroughfare, and by three such unlikely-looking people as the magnificently dressed, rather haughty-looking, pale young lady, the bronzed dark man, and the sleek, perfectly-appointed, elderly-young Adonis, with a gold-headed cane and white hat; that one represented black despair; the other, crushed, blighted hopes; the third, unalloyed triumph!

A whole week had elapsed before Pauline's expectations were realised, and, raising her head one day, as she sat alone in the conservatory, she beheld the footman ushering Mr. Lorraine into the drawing-room, and was not surprised. She expected him, rising at once to offer him what welcome she could.

At first he talked of his journey, of the weather, of the most utter commonplace topics, evidently looking to her to break the ice.

It must be broken sooner or later, she told herself, with a sense of desperation, and acting on a sudden impulse, she invited him into the conservatory to look at her magnificent show of azaleas.

They went slowly down the steps, and glanced vaguely round on the great big bushes trimmed out with wire to artificial shapes, and covered with pale pink, rose, purple, and white blooms. And then they turned and looked at one another.

“Oscar,” said the lady, speaking first, as is most usual, “I know that you are thinking of me. You cannot think of me worse than I deserve, nor half as badly as I think of myself. But badly as I have used you, it is not my fault. I am not—oh! what am I saying!” she exclaimed, putting her hands to her temples. “You must not mind half I say, you know. I—I” casting wildly about for some straw to cling to—“I am not quite like other people.”

Her look was full of terror and perplexity.

“No,”—he paused for a moment, and then evidently made up his mind as to his line of action. “Sit down here, Pauline,” he added, passing a cushioned wicker chair towards her, and drawing up another for himself. “You know you never need be afraid of me. Whatever else I have aspired to be I am always your friend. You are ill,” he added, anxiously. “I am sorry to see you so changed.”

“Oh! Oscar,” she murmured tremulously, “you are pouring coals of fire on my head. It is more than I deserve.”

“No, not more than you deserve if you tell me why. I left England on six months’ probation, bearing your solemn promise that you would be my wife. A woman may change her mind—they mostly do—and of that I say but little—the loss is mine. But why do I return and find that you are to marry the Russian—a man as unsuited to you as any man could be—and that within the next two weeks! You are not marrying him for love, I can see that,” with a touch of scorn in his face—“nor for money, nor yet for position, nor still less for his personal attractions and moral worth,” with stinging emphasis. “Give me the key to the riddle, since I cannot discover it myself,” he demanded mercilessly.

“I cannot, I dare not,” she answered, with white lips and averted eyes.

“You dare not! You are in his power!” cried Lorraine. “I read it in your face,” which truly expressed hardened despair.

“It is true,” she answered, sadly, “and I am powerless to resist my fate as the miserable little boat that is caught in the rapids above Niagara and hurled over the Falls. Since you left me everything went against me. I wish every day I had never been born. I seem to

have been brought into the world to be the sport of fate.”

“Then you are not happy?” he asked, bluntly.

“Happy!” and a shiver shook her frame. “Do I look happy! I am resigned, that is all,” she replied, in a hopeless voice.

“But I am not resigned!” he cried, with sudden passion. “If it were for your happiness I could give you up. Yes, I could,” he added, emphatically, “hard as it would be; but to this viper, who has you in his coils, this vampire, who is playing on your life now, as he will on your fortune hereafter, I will resign you never!”

He spoke rapidly, and with unusual vehemence, and Pauline gazed at him with blank stupefaction.

“You can do nothing,” she murmured. “It is too late.”

“Not too late yet,” he said, standing up. “I can see, though you will not tell me, that you fear him, that he wields some whip of scorpions over you, some burning mutual secret! I shall share it too! I shall wrest it from his grasp! You may not marry me, Pauline, but you shall never be forced to wed that scoundrel!”

“Oh! Oscar, take care what you are saying!” she gasped, also rising, and looking at him piteously. “Leave me, I implore you, for your own sake, to my fate. You cannot prevent it, and to meddle with our secret would be death,” lowering her voice to an awestruck whisper.

“We must all die sooner or later, and death has no great terrors for me. I’ve seen him pretty close once or twice, and I undertake to release you if you will from this marriage. Will you accept my offer?” looking at her anxiously.

“Oscar,” she murmured, “I dare not.”

“Dare not! Then read this paper,” producing a yellow packet from his coat pocket, and flinging it down upon the little wicker table that stood between them, and on which lay Pauline’s work and books. “Read what this paper of your mother says, and tell me you will not dare then.”

(To be continued.)

THE most peculiar custom of the Australian aborigines is the mutilation of teeth. The boy who wants to be thought a man will often break out one of his front teeth, thus anticipating the ceremony which always takes place when a young Australian is acknowledged to have entered manhood. The tooth is knocked out with a great deal of brutality, the pain being born with the stoicism which marks the old inhabitants of the Antipodes in their daily life. One seldom meets a full-grown native Australian with a complete set of teeth, and the first impression is that they are natural born fighters, and that each has lost a tooth in some more or less vicious conflict. The explanation given, however, is the correct one, and the practice prevails even among civilized and Christianised tribes.

SOMEWHERE in south western Mexico, in the Sierra Madre, it is said there is a wonderful valley. Small, enclosed in high rocky walls, and accessible only by a secret passage, which is known to but a few, is this extraordinary place. It is about ten acres in extent, has running through it a stream which waters it thoroughly, and makes it a perfect paradise, with its exquisite flowers and beautiful trees. In it are thousands of birds of the most beautiful plumage. A ledge of pure gold crosses it, and glistens in the sun like a great golden belt. The stream runs over this ledge murmuring around blocks of yellow metal as others do around pebbles. The ledge is supposed to be of solid gold, and to run down into the centre of the earth. The legend is of Indian origin, and around it clusters a number of Indian stories, in which the name of the ill-fated Montezuma occurs frequently. The descendants of the Aztecs believe firmly that the day will come when Montezuma will return and free them from the descendants of the conquistadores. They believe that the money necessary for this work will be taken from the Madre d’Or,

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

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“WHY, George Winter, you’re surely not going to wear that!”

“Just as surely as you’re going to wear this, Bess.”

They stood facing each other, these two fiancées and far-away cousins, ready dressed for the charity ball given that night by the Daughters of the People.

Each—as it had been arranged those who opened the ball with a minuet should do—was wearing an ancestral costume.

Bess Allison, a dainty, roseate, dazzling little blonde, rustled in brocade bodice and train of pale pink and paler blue, all agleam with silver threads and looped away from a petticoat of quilted, cream-coloured satin.

Her hair towered six inches above her brow in a marvellous structure of puffs and curls, its bright gold gleaming faintly under a rime of powder. A small constellation of black court-plaster stars accented her peach-bloom and dimples.

Her high-heeled satin slippers were adorned with huge buckles, there were strands of pearls about her round white throat, and all her mother’s many diamonds flashed at her ears and bosom, and on her arms and hands.

Opposite this elegant court-lady, stood an equally antique figure—a tall, athletic young man in plainest attire, without even a buckle on his low shoes.

He wore neither coat nor waistcoat; his sleeves were rolled up to partially display two muscular arms; a blacksmith’s leather apron was girded round him, and a small hammer stuck jauntily in his belt.

His short, curly black hair, smooth-shaven, strong-featured face, and brilliant, honest blue eyes, harmonised well with this make-up.

“Who,” demanded Bess, pointing distractedly to their contrasted images in the long mirror, “could ever imagine we were related?”

“Anybody might,” stoutly maintained Mr. Winter, “anybody who knew how mixed most American ancestries are, where we have any at all. We’re equally true to the facts, Bess. You,” with a sweeping bow to the pretty point-device dame in the glass, “are the Lady Betty Destayne, the distinguished exile from England, and I the patriotic American blacksmith, Daniel Winter, *redivivus*. They were both our ancestors, and we will both do them credit by our dancing to-night.”

“Do you suppose I will dance with that awful apron, George Winter?”

George glanced down at the said article approvingly. He was rather proud of having combined in it strict realism, and safety to his partner’s fine clothes.

“The marks won’t rub off,” he assured her. “They’re only painted on. You couldn’t expect a blacksmith’s apron to be quite speckless, you know.”

Bess sank into a chair, and regarded him with severe brown eyes.

“It isn’t the—the soot,” she replied disgustfully. “It’s the hopeless lowness of the whole thing. When you had the chance of appearing as an ancestor you could be proud of—”

“I am proud of Daniel,” stoutly interjected George. “He fought all through the revolution.”

“Then why on earth didn’t you wear his uniform, at least?”

“Because his working clothes are more original. There’ll be plenty of uniforms at the ball. Besides, Daniel never sunk the blacksmith. He went away straight from his shop into the army, and when his company got into a terribly tight place for want of traps, he pulled off his captain’s epaulettes and pitched right in to forge bayonets and shoe horses. There’s quite a story about the brave old boy, altogether.”

“I don’t care to hear it,” said Bess, with a disdainful droop of her fringed eyelids. “I never was interested in the lower orders.”

“The lower orders!” repeated George, in righteous wrath. “Why, you little dudine,

Daniel was your several-times-great-grandfather as well as mine, and,—"

Bess's huge Watteau fan rejected the suggestion with fluttering scorn.

"What if he was!" she queried. "A hundred years and more are surely enough to bury a disgrace to the family like that. Now the Lady Betty and her husband—"

"Oh, bother them both!" interrupted their hot-tempered descendant, irreverently. "What do we know of them, anyway, except that they existed, and she left a pretty miniature to go down in your branch of the family? She didn't do anything much that ever we heard of, except be born an earl's daughter, which was no merit of hers. Add then for her sake you call a grand old patriotic fellow like Daniel a disgrace to the family, when he was worth several dozens of her, in all probability!"

Bess's fan shut with an ominous click, as announcing a finality. She rose with the utmost dignity so small a lady could summon.

"Well, Mr. Winter, since you make it so very evident that you have no regard at all for my feelings, and can delight in publicly humiliating me by assuming that horrid character, I think we had better part at once. It is plain we are too opposite by nature and education ever to get on together. Perhaps you can find some blacksmith's daughter to wear this ring."

She dropped her engagement ring on the table beside him, and swept imperially past to meet her chaperon, an obliging acquaintance, who arrived with her own daughter at that moment.

And among the three conversation was kept up with such spirit that neither then nor on the way to the ball could George get a chance for a single serious word with Bess.

It seemed to him absurd as well as wretched to be dismissed for such a cause. Yet he knew what a sacred fetish the Lady Betty Destayre had always been to her namesake and descendant, Bess Allison.

Mrs. Allison had been a widow and an invalid for years, with few other interests in life than to nurse her nerves and spoil her only daughter.

She had idealized the memory of the fair ancestress of whom so little was known beyond her name and the beauty of her pearl-rimmed ivory miniature, and was filled with profound belief in her own claims to aristocracy.

Bess had very naturally absorbed the same ideas, and held her bright head full high in consequence.

Indeed it must be recorded that her best friends had sometimes heard more than enough of the Lady Betty Destayre; while as for those acquaintances who were not so fond of Bess, and who had no aristocratic ancestors of their own, they avowed themselves, in secret, weary of her ladyship's very name.

Perhaps the weariest among them was Mabel Freeman, a tall, handsome, dark-eyed girl, on whom any mention of the Lady Betty had jarred ever since she and Bess were small schoolmates and rivals.

Their rivalry had not lessened with years, and Bess was consequently rather surprised at the great cordiality of Mabel's manner when they met in a pause between the dances that night.

Mabel had no revolutionary ancestors, and had, therefore, chosen an historical costume—the soft, Jovellike gray gown, spotless lawn neckerchief and apron and transparent muslin cap of the Quakeress, Lydia Darragh.

No dress could have seemed less appropriate to her dashing vivacious style, yet none could have been more becoming than was this artfully quiet setting to her brilliant glow and sparkle and life.

Her young radiance was still further set off just then by contrast with the man on whose arm she leaned—a short, stout, elderly personage, at once ruddy and withered, with beautiful white hair, neat little whiskers, and friendly, peering, short-sighted grey eyes.

Only the necessity of seeing as much as possible of the manners and customs of America during the two months' visit, on which he meant to base a three volume book of travels, had brought Professor Smith-Percy, the distinguished

English genealogist and antiquarian, to anything so frivolous as a ball.

Mabel introduced him right and left to this little group of young people, with a certain air of triumph.

"Bess, dear," she said, when at last she came to Miss Allison. "I know you'll be delighted to meet this gentleman. He can tell you all about the Lady Betty. He just mentioned to me that he'd often seen her picture at the old castle in England, and I told him he must come right away and talk to you, for you were so much interested in her genealogy. Miss Allison—Professor Smith-Percy."

The Professor bowed bobbingly; fixing a friendly and admiring gaze on Bess, whom he hailed as a fellow-antiquarian, and inwardly marvelling at her youth and sex and charm in association with such pursuits.

Bess's fair head bent reverently low in greeting, but it was held higher than ever with pride as she drew her small self up, cast a grateful glance at Mabel and one of scornful superiority at George, who was steadfastly fanning his latest partner hard by, and then waited with pleased serenity for the Professor to speak.

It added intensity to her pleasure that George was there to hear.

"It is the Lady Betty Destayre, the daughter of Lord Lynwood, of Lynwood Castle, whom Miss Allison is interested in," prompted Mabel, as the Professor seemed to loose the sense of an audience in mental note-taking for his book.

"Yes, certainly," he began, briskly coming back to reality. "I am well acquainted with the lady's English record, though not with her life after she went to Virginia; but perhaps you can supply me with that—eh, Miss Allison?"

"Oh, yes!" sighed Bess, happily. "I know all about the American genealogy."

"A very fine study for young people, is genealogy," approved the Professor, cordially. "But you might have taken a better family than the Destayres to look up, young lady. Now in England they are very third-rate—very third-rate indeed, you know. Shouldn't have known much about them myself, if I hadn't happened to be brought up near the castle."

"But then there is a castle," weakly insisted Bess—"a castle and family portraits. You said so yourself."

"Oh, yes—yes!" admitted Professor Smith-Percy, indifferently—"a castle that another family built, and that the first Lord Lynwood bought when he bought his title. His grandfather made the family fortune in the Guinea trade—slaves, you know—and his grandson had spent pretty much all of it by the time the Lady Betty was born."

"She was a London toast at one time—oh, yes, a great toast and beauty! The people that have the castle now keep her picture for its looks, since her story's mostly forgotten; but she always failed to make the great match she was expected to. Rather too giddy, I fancy."

"Finally she ran away from Bath with a foreign adventurer—a professional gambler and a bad lot all round—and took all a friend's jewels with her. Somehow the family managed to smooth it over enough to get her and her husband packed off to Virginia, where the Destayres had some wild land, instead of being sent to prison."

"And you say you have followed their line in America, Miss Allison? Now, I should really like to know, as a point in heredity, if there ever were any tolerably respectable—Why, where is Miss Allison?"

The friendly old gentleman peered about among his audience in mild wonder, but Bess Allison was not there.

While he was still holding forth about the Destayres, absorbed in the innocent delight of giving pleasure and information together, and heedless of the distant strains of dance music beginning, George Winter had offered his arm to Bess, who stood confused and agonised, but still resolute not to break down before the others—above all, before Mabel.

"This is our dance, I believe," he said, though he knew it was not, as Bess had altogether refused him a place on her card, and she clutched his shirt-sleeved arm with relief and swept her

brocade train away toward the ball-room with graceful dignity.

But they did not reach the dancers. Instead, they turned aside into a sheltered little nook of palms and ferns and flowers, and there Bess sank forlornly down on a low seat, and regarded her brocade and satin and jewels, all so carefully copied after the Lady Betty's, through tears of passionate disgust.

"A slave-dealer, a *parvenu* earl, an adventurer and a thief!" she enumerated, at last, amid despairing sobs. "Oh, what a set of ancestors! How could Mabel be such a cat, even if I have talked up the Lady Betty to her ever since we were in French verbs together? And that Professor! It was too cruel of her and him."

"The Professor didn't know we belonged to the family," soothed George, "and I'm sure Miss Freeman didn't know all he was going to say. One could see it was a surprise to her."

"Ye-es," moaned Bess, "I saw it was ever so much better—I mean worse—than she had hoped. Oh, how can I ever look any of them in the face again after all this?"

"You can't," averred George, with decision, "unless you get somebody to back you up—somebody that's never bragged about the Lady Betty—somebody willing to stand on your and his own merits, and let aristocratic ancestors slide—somebody like—er—well, like me!"

By the time he had reached this climax, Miss Allison's April face had changed from tears to smiles, and she regarded him with a friendly gaze as he took possession of one of her pretty, lace-mittened hands.

"Come, now, make it up with me, dear," he pleaded, with half-laughing, half-tender blue eyes, bending his dark head close to hers. "Kiss and be friends, sweetheart, and let me comfort you!"

And Bess yielded.

"It was so good of you to take me away from that dreadful Professor's prying!" she murmured, a little later. "And you've always been so much more sensible than I, that I really can't help making up—especially since I've been wanting to all the evening! Only you must promise never to throw up the Lady Betty to me!"

"Oh course I'll promise!" said George. "From what little we know of them, too, she and her husband seem to have straightened out and done well after they came to America, and I'd always rather remember the good of any one than the bad, even if it wasn't a family affair. Besides," he went on, wickedly, "a hundred years and more are surely enough to bury a disgrace to the family like—"

He did not quite finish the quotation. All Bess's new-born meekness could not keep her from boxing his ears with her fan.

THERE is no other work in the world of which so many copies are printed annually as the Chinese almanack. The number is estimated at several millions. This almanack is printed at Peking, and is a monopoly of the Emperor. It not only predicts the weather, but notes the days that are reckoned lucky or unlucky for commencing any undertaking, for applying remedies in diseases, for marrying and for burying, with other "useful information," all equally reliable, of the same kind.

SOME of the farmers of the Eifel, the district that lies between the frontier of Belgium and the Rhine, adopt a novel plan for scaring the birds from the wheat. A number of poles are set up in the cornfields and a wire is conducted from one to the other, just like the telegraph posts that are placed along our railways. From the top of each pole there hangs a bell, which is connected with the wire. Now, in the valley a brook runs along, with a current strong enough to turn a small water wheel to which the wire is fastened. As the wheel goes round it jerks the wire, and so the bells in the different fields are set to tinkling. The bells thus mysteriously rung frighten the birds from the grain, and even excite the wonder of men and women until they discover the secret. This simple contrivance is found to serve its purpose very well.

FACETIÆ.

WHAT fruit is the most visionary? The apple of the eye.

HE (philosophically): "Do you approve of going to the theatre?" She (practically): "Oh, thank you! Any night you like!"

"I ALWAYS used to over-estimate my abilities," he remarked. "Well, never mind," she replied consolingly, "Your friends never did."

UNCLE TREMOR: "This is about the best laying hen I have got." Miss Sundun: "How many eggs does she lay for a shilling?"

MISS CLARA: "Where did you spend the summer?" Miss Helen: "Papa says I spent that and everything else at Llandudno."

HER MA: "Sir, you've stolen my daughter's love!" Bold Culprit: "Well, didn't I return it?" Her Ma (making her exit, aside): "Another case of 'honour among thieves.'"

BOARDER: "Whew! This milk has an awfully queer taste!" Landlady (tasting): "Well, no wonder. There's neither chalk nor water in it yet."

LADY OF THE HOUSE: "Have you good references?" "References, is it! Oh have that, and from dozens of mistresses! Oh have lived with the last six months."

"Soo! Miss Mary, dey tell me dat you shall tell my garbiter by my handt!" "Well, to begin with, you're a German—" "Ach, it is wonderful!"

SHE: "Why, good evening! Come in! We are having charades." He (delightedly): "Are you! I thought I smelt them, and I'm awfully fond of them."

"No," he said, firmly, "you cannot have a new hat." "And this," she bitterly exclaimed, "in spite of your pledge that you would not interfere with my religion!"

SYMPATHISING FRIEND: "It must give one a queer feeling to have one's pocket picked." Victim: "You don't feel it at all. That's the misery of it."

"WELL, Pat, what can I do for you?" asked the physician upon whom Pat had called. "Faith, shure, if I knowed that," replied Pat, "I'd not be paying yez 5s. for telling me."

"My dear," said the fond wife, "when we were engaged, I always slept with your last letter under my pillow." "And I," murmured her husband, "I, too, often went to sleep over your letters."

"You have plenty of reading here," said a visitor to the literary editor, pointing to a pile of books on the editorial desk. "Those are not for reading," replied the editor. "They are for reviewing."

MISS ARAELLA: "Don't you think that I look dreadfully pale, doctor?" Doctor: "Yes, indeed, you do, mademoiselle." "Then what do you advise me to do?" "Wash some of the powder off your face."

"Oh, darling, you sing like a lark—" "Now, don't flatter, please." "You are as graceful as a gazelle, as plump as a partridge, as—" "Come, come, I know you are not flattering me now. You're only making game of me."

MRS. POUNCELIGH: "Aren't you the tramp who was here this morning?" Odorous Oliver: "Yes, mum." "Well, I missed a cake I had left in the window." "I took it, mum." "Didn't you know better than that?" "No, mum, not then. I hadn't eat it then, mum."

LITTLE DOT: "Mamma, I was playin' with your best tea-set while you were away, an' when you bring it out for company you'll be shocked, 'cause you'll think one of the cups has a hair in it; but it isn't a hair." Mamma: "What is it?" Little Dot: "It's only a crack."

BINKS: "By the way, Winks, the doctor advised you to use dumb-bells, didn't he?" Winks: "Yes, and I must see about getting a pair." "Well, I have a pair you can have." "Tired of them?" "Don't need 'em. The twins are teething."

THE SLOW WAITER (who has been tardily delivering dinner to a guest): "I'm afraid I can't give you any watermelon, sir. Those we got ain't ripe." The Guest: "Never mind. It'll be ripe by the time you get it."

LAWYER (to burglar client): "I'm afraid the case will go against you. The owner of the house says you left incriminating indications behind you." B. C.: "Just my luck! If I'd known they was there I'd a took them too!"

"Now," shrieked Mr. Barnes Tormer, in the great melodrama, "Fished from the Ferry," "now is the time to act." "By George!" shouted one of the two men in the gallery, "I thought it was purty near time for him to begin actin' if he ever wuz goin' to."

MRS. NEXDOOR: "Your little boy climbed over the fence and ran all over my flower-beds." Mrs. Suburb: "Horrors! They had just been watered, hadn't they?" "N-o," "Oh, well, never mind; the exercise won't hurt him if he didn't get his feet wet."

MISSIONARY: "I think of getting up a series of revival meetings for young men." Villager: "Waste of time. Not at all needed, sir. The young men of this town lead strictly moral lives." "My, my! To what benign influence do you ascribe that remarkable condition?" "They are all saving up for pneumatics."

A FIRM that has recently introduced a typewriter into their correspondence department received a letter from an indignant customer the other day, saying, "I want you to understand that you needn't print letters sent to me. I can read writing—even yours—and I don't want to be insulted by reflections on my education."

KIND LADY: "I see a little girl and her little brother crying over there. Do you know what is the matter?" Small Miss: "The little girl is cryin' because some bad boys tied a tin can to a dog's tail. I don't know what the little boy is cryin' for. Likely 'cause he didn't get there in time to see it."

"How long did it take you to cross the ocean?" asked Gus De Smith of the recently imported American millionaire's charming daughter. "I was seven days on the water." "Seven days! Why, when my brother went across it took him eight days." "Probably your brother went over in the steerage. I was a first cabin passenger," she replied proudly.

INFERIOR MAN: "But really, now, what is it you are aiming at? What do you want? Liberty, fraternity, and equality, I suppose!" Superior Woman: "Oh, dear, no! Liberty we can help ourselves to, fraternity with man we would not accept, and as to equality, I fear we cannot expect your sex to rise to that for many generations to come."

"I just detest that Mr. Bloomy," said Miss Bellevue to her particular friend. "Why?" "I overheard Mr. Hiland telling him I was to be married soon, and what do you suppose the wretch replied?" "I suppose he said he envied the bridegroom-elect?" "Indeed, he didn't say anything of the kind?" "What did he say?" "He said, 'Who is the victim!'"

SOME years ago, at the Derby, when the grand prize was won by a French horse, the Frenchmen present cheered most vociferously, and, in addition to other expressions of triumph, one of them shouted "Waterloo avenged!" "Yes," said Sir John Astley, who was standing by, and whose ready wit and crushing sarcasm have so often turned the tables on his opponents, "you ran well in both cases."

A DELATED tourist was obliged to ask for a bed at a farmhouse, having wandered far from his hotel. On rising in the morning he found himself without tooth-powder. Looking about him he espied on the mantelpiece a small box containing powder which he used. When he paid for his bed he apologised to the farmer's wife for having used her tooth-powder. "Tooth-powder!" she queried, "we have none." "Yes, my good woman, it was in a small, round box on the mantelpiece." "That!" she screamed, "that was not tooth-powder!—that was aunty!" Aunty had been cremated.

CALLER: "Is Miss Sweete at home?" Servant: "No, sir." "Please tell her I called. Don't forget, will you?" "No, sir; I'll go and tell her this minute."

A WOMAN was complaining very bitterly about the cruelty of her husband. Her minister advised her to try the effect of kindness upon him, and in the words of Scripture, "heap coals of fire upon his head." "I've tried boiling water already," she replied, "and that's done no good."

A WELL-KNOWN actor, who is celebrated amongst other members of his own profession for being next door to a miser—in other words, very stingy—was, a little while back, so impressed with the charms of a certain favourite American actress that he nerved himself up for once in a way to offer to pay for some refreshment for her. It was at a bazaar, and he devoutly hoped and expected her to say "a cup of tea" or some other equally inexpensive item. However, she had different ideas. "I guess," she replied, without a moment's hesitation, "that I'll have a bottle of champagne." "Guess again!" was the only remark the actor had strength to utter, "guess again!"

BASHFUL, but desperately in love, the young Aberdonian, finding that no notice was taken of his frequent visits to the house of his sweetheart, summoned up sufficient courage to address the fair one thus: "Jennie, I wis here on Monday night." "Aye, ye were that," acknowledged she. "An' I wis here on Tuesday night." "So ye were." "An' I wis here on Wednesday," continued the ardent youth. "Aye, an' ye were here on Thursday night." "An' I wis here last night, Jennie." "Weel," she said, "what if ye were?" "An' I am here this night again." "An' what about it, even if ye cam' every night!" "What about it, did ye say, Jennie! Div ye no begin to smell a rat!"

THE following is told of a stage-struck youth. He was studying the part of Hamlet for an amateur performance, and, as is usual in such cases, everything he said assumed somewhat of the morose Dane. It happened that one morning, during his walks abroad, he came across an excavation with two or three men digging below, and, with the "Gravedigger's Scene" in his mind's eye, demanded, in tragic tones: "Whose grave's this, sir?" and paused for reply, but none came. Again he demanded: "Whose grave's this, sir?" But this time a voice that appeared to proceed from the bowels of the earth replied: "Ger out, yer born idiot, we're only laying a gas-pipe!" (Curtain.)

"AND what has become of Jed Thomas?" asked the little old man with the queer whiskers, who was paying a visit to his native Norfolk village after many a year's sojourn in Australia, and was in pursuit of information respecting the village celebrities of his early years. "Jed Thomas," said the polished villager, "has joined the great majority." "Phew! You don't say so! And old Jenkins, is he living?" "Mr. Jenkins passed away about a year ago." "Dear! dear! But how about old Mrs. Skinton?" "Mrs. Skinton has solved the great problem." "Well, that beats all! How they do hang out! And all of 'em up to somethin' uncommon. Strange! Hasn't there been any deaths at all down in Seedville since I come away?"

NOTWITHSTANDING Colonel Bangs is only a militia colonel, and never had a title in his life until a year ago, he does not like to air his colonelcy on all occasions, and for some time he has looked with disfavour upon the cards of his wife which read, "Mrs. Colonel Bangs." The other day she told him to order her some more cards. "Certainly, my dear," he responded, for the colonel is as gallant to his wife as most men are to other women. "But if I do I shall have that 'colonel' omitted." "Oh, no!" she protested; "what do you want to do that for?" "Because it shouldn't be there." "Why not? It is only a designation of who I am, and you are Colonel Bangs, aren't you?" "Of course I am." "Then why am I not Mrs. Colonel Bangs?" The colonel bowed. "For the same reason, my dear," he responded, "that when I was Mr. Bangs you were not Mrs. Mr. Bangs." And the colonel won a victory.

SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales' collection of lace is now worth something like £50,000.

SOME alterations have been completed at Balmoral since the Queen's last visit, and many of the apartments have been redecorated.

THERE is again a report of the engagement of the Duc d'Aosta to Princess Clementine of Belgium. The match seems from every point of view to be a suitable one.

THE Cesarewitch is going to Germany about the middle of this month for a stay of several weeks. He will visit the Duke and Duchess of Coburg at Coburg and the Grand Duke and Duchess of Hesse at Darmstadt; he is also expected at Copenhagen.

By a curious coincidence the date of the visit of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York to Castle Bromwich, to lay the foundation stone of the new General Hospital at Birmingham, fell upon the silver wedding day of their host and hostess, as it was twenty-five years since Lord and Lady Newport arrived for their honeymoon at the old Elizabethan hall where they entertained their distinguished guests.

THE Duke of Coburg it is said, has given his son, Prince Alfred permission to correspond with Princess Olga with a view to marriage. She is the twin sister of Duchess Elsa and daughter of the late Duke Eugene of Wurttemberg and the Grand Duchess Vera. These two lovely twin Duchesses are just over eighteen years old, and they will each have large fortunes, but Prince Alfred of Coburg is stated to be as much in love with one twin as with the other.

THE Duchess of Albany is to reside at Birkhall until October 23rd, when she goes to Camperdown House, Forfarshire, on a visit to Lord Camperdown and his sister, Lady Abercromby. The Duchess is to visit Dundee on October 24th, when she will receive an address from the Lord Provost and the Corporation, and she is to be entertained at luncheon in the Victoria Art Galleries. On the 25th H.R.H. is to open a bazaar in aid of the local volunteers, and on the 27th she will leave Camperdown House for Clarendon.

THE little Prince is an exceptionally fine child, and, what is more, he daily increases in size and good looks, and promises to be more robust than most of the Royal children. He is out of doors as much as possible, and is not in the least coddled. It is his mother's wish that he should be brought up most simply, as she and her brothers were, which is, in fact, the only healthy way to bring up a child, and all the Teck family are firm believers in the virtue of fresh air.

THE Queen intends to reside at Balmoral until November 15th or 16th, and during about six weeks from the middle of this month a large number of guests will be entertained at the Castle, including the Prince of Wales (for two or three days, when on his way to Braemar), the Duke and Duchess of York (also a short visit), the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse and (probably) Princess Alix of Hesse, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge Alexandrovitch, Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia, Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse, and Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein.

THE Duke and Duchess of York will leave Braemar on Wednesday, October 3rd, for Edinburgh, proceeding on the following day to Temple Newsam Hall, Yorkshire, when they are to be the guests of Mrs. Meynell-Ingram for two nights, and then they will come to town on Saturday the 6th. The Duke and Duchess will probably visit Mr. Graham Vivian at Clyne Hall, Glamorganshire, during the second week in October, after which they are to settle for the winter at York Cottage, Sandringham. The Duke and Duchess of Teck are to be their guests for some time there, and will stay until they go to Eaton for the marriage of Lady Margaret Grosvenor and Prince Adolphus of Teck, who is, we hear, to be made a K.C.B. on the occasion of his wedding.

STATISTICS.

ONLY one man in 208 is over 6 feet high.

ABOUT £10,000,000 worth of property is yearly lost by fire in England.

REPTILES and wild beasts kill 25,000 people annually in India.

AUSTRIA is the country most lenient to murderers. In the 10 years ending in 1879 there were found 816 criminals guilty of murder, of whom only 23 were put to death.

STATISTICS show that in one thousand marriages three hundred and thirty-two men marry women younger than themselves, five hundred and seventy-nine marry women of their own age, or near it, and eighty-nine marry women older than themselves.

GEMS.

SEARCH for truth is the noblest occupation of man; its publication a duty.

VANITY makes us do more things against inclination than reason.

Too much idleness fills up a man's time much more completely, and leaves him less his own master than any sort of employment whatever.

HE that cometh to seek after knowledge with a mind to scorn and censure shall be sure to find matter for his humour, but no matter for his instruction.

THERE is a care for trifles which proceeds from love of conscience and is most holy; and a care for trifles which comes of idleness and frivolity, and is most base.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

POTTED LOBSTER.—Pick and pound the meat from a boiled lobster with a quarter of a pound of good butter, a little pepper, salt and powdered mace; press into pots while hot; when cold, pour a little oiled butter over the top.

BEETROOT SALAD.—Slice a cold boiled or baked beetroot, arrange it in slices overlapping each other, pour over a mixture made with cream, a very little vinegar, pepper and salt; garnish the dish with horseradish and hard-boiled eggs, whites and yolks separate.

BLACKBERRY CORDIAL.—Squeeze blackberries enough to make a quart of juice, add to it a pound of loaf sugar and let it dissolve, heating it slowly. Add to it one teaspoonful of cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. Boil all together twenty minutes. On removing from the fire, add a wineglass of brandy. Put in bottles while hot and seal. Use a teaspoonful for a glass of iced water.

STUFFED VEGETABLE MARROW.—Boil a nice-sized vegetable marrow with the skin on. Take it up, remove the skin, cut off a piece at one end and scoop out all the seeds. Have ready some minced meat (any kind will do); add a little chopped ham; season highly with sweet herbs, pepper and salt; mix with an egg. Fill the marrow with this, replace the top, place it in a baking tin and roast, basting nicely. Sprinkle brown bread-crumbs and chopped parsley over before serving, and pour a little good gravy around.

BLACKBERRY FROTH.—Take the whites of four eggs, one cup blackberry juice, two cups boiling water, one cup cold water, one half box gelatine, one cup sugar. Soak the gelatine in the cold water for one hour, stir the sugar into it, and pour the boiling water over them. When they are dissolved add the blackberry juice, strain and set on the ice until the jelly is nearly firm. Beat the whites of the eggs stiff and whip into the jelly a little at a time. Turn into a mould wet with cold water, and let it stand until firm. Eat with sweet cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE two swiftest runners of the animal creation are the kangaroo and the ostrich.

THE first exhibition of regularly trained gladiators in Rome was B.C. 254.

SOME Chinese and many Africans use the ear as a pocket to carry coins and other small articles.

THE note of the bell bird sounds like the tolling of a bell, and can be heard a distance of three miles.

BEFORE storing honey in trees, bees will clean the trees of all rotten wood and refuse. They never do anything by halves.

A DEVICE to enable bicycle riders to observe vehicles approaching from the rear without being obliged to turn and look back has been patented.

THERE is a lift at Balmoral, which runs from the dining-room library up to the corridor from which the Queen's own set of apartments opens.

AN oculist is said to be doing a tremendous business in Tokio by straightening the slant in the eyes of the Japanese. A fine silk thread draws up the eyelids and holds them in place.

THE robbery of graves is the only crime under the Chinese law for which the thief may be justly killed on the spot by anyone finding him out.

IN 1461 a fashion of gold collars came in. They were of solid gold and enclosed the neck, fastening with a padlock in front. Some of them weighed over a pound.

GREENLAND's interior is estimated to be covered by a shield-shaped cap of snow and ice not less than five thousand feet, or one mile in thickness.

MAIL matter dropped in a box in Paris is delivered in Berlin within an hour and a half, and some times within thirty-five minutes. It is sent by means of pneumatic tubes.

RANK was denoted in ancient France by the shape and style of the shoe worn by the ladies. Only ladies of the highest rank were allowed to wear the peculiar-shaped shoe known as the paribarides.

A SECRET cave has lately been discovered in Mexico. In the cave were the embalmed bodies of three Jews wearing the Tallis and Tephillin. According to a tablet in Hebrew, the cave is 611 years old.

OPINIONS differ as to the correct form in dining tables. John Bull loves a round table, the German is partial to an oval board, and the French like the cold square lines; in America all three are used.

IN the Sandwich Islands the apple has become wild, and forests of trees of many acres are found in various parts of the country. They extend from the level of the sea far up into the mountain sides. It is said that miles of these apple forests can occasionally be seen.

A RUNAWAY horse is rarely seen in Russia. Every driver puts around his horse's neck a thin cord with a running noose. If the animal tries to run away, a sudden jerk of the cord compresses his windpipe, and he at once becomes submissive.

GOLD in transit across the Atlantic "aweats," no matter how tightly it may be packed. It is usually sent in stout kegs, and squeezed in as tight as possible, but there is a regular allowance for loss by attrition upon the voyage; and in the course of years this loss to the commercial world amounts to a large sum.

NEAR Aberystwith, on the west coast of Wales where the Monk River flows through a black, yawning abyss, there is a single arch bridge of unknown antiquity. The popular legend says that it was built by the devil, and far and near it is known as "The Bridge of Devils," or "The Bridge of the Evil Mag." British antiquarians are united in the belief that it was built by the early monks, but that fact does not affect the popular legend in the least, "Old Harry's" part in it's erection being never questioned by the inhabitants of Cardiganshire.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

INQUIRER.—Pronounced Tebb'l Keeb'r.

IS TROUBLE.—The matter is beyond our advice.

PAUL.—We never advise regarding investments.

R. T.—One lemon a day is about the very best tonic.

E. T.—His only remedy now is in the County Court.

CONSTANT READER.—The climate of Hayti is wholly tropical.

LONDONER.—Beoley is in Worcestershire, near Redditch.

INQUISITIVE.—Surgery is known to have existed a c. 219.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—We could not honestly offer advice in such a case.

BOOKWORM.—Fielding's works are, of course, out of copyright.

FLORA.—Crysanthemums live the longest after being cut.

B. S.—The will must be proved before it can be acted upon.

HELENE.—The play is not published either in French or English.

WRATHFUL.—You are not entitled to compensation in the case stated.

INDECISION.—We do not see that a case against employers can be had.

ELLA.—All you can do is to give notice in the usual way and leave.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—A doctor is not bound by law to go to a case when called upon.

E. A. G.—Apply to the nearest magistrate for a summons against the offender.

JULIA.—You cannot soften the waterproof, it has been allowed to waste, and is done.

WILSON.—Write to the headmaster who will give you information at once.

DURION ONE.—A sister's stepdaughter is not within the prohibited degrees as to marriage.

OLD READER.—Health officer has nothing to do with prosecutions for cruelty to children.

BLOUSEBELLA.—Wash them first in cold water; afterwards rinse in hot water.

FRITZ.—"Che sara, sara," the motto of the Dukes of Bedford; signifies "What will be, will be."

ANXIOUS ONE.—All appointments are made by the individual known as the shore steward to whom write.

SANDY.—A publican may entertain his own friends at his own cost, during closing hours.

APPOINTED ONE.—It is said that castor oil applied once a day for several weeks will remove warts.

JONATHAN.—A farmer can use a gun to herd crows and shoot vermin without having a gun license.

M. G. C.—Few persons collect monograms, so that a collection of these would bring but a trifling sum.

LONDON.—See a directory. We cannot give trade addresses.

REGULAR READER.—The Post Office is not liable for damage or loss caused by the accidental misdelivery or delay of a letter.

STANCA CONSERVATIVE.—The Duke of Edinburgh was married on January 23rd, 1874; Princess Louise married on March 21st, 1871.

PAT.—You could probably ascertain by writing to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W.

EDWINA.—Swift, in the "Battle of the Books," speaks of "The two noblest things, which are sweetness and light."

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.—Poaching is the test of an egg above reproach. Only a fresh egg will stand the boiling water bath.

C. F. J.—All the leading insurance companies grant annuities; you can ascertain their terms by applying at the respective offices.

SYD.—Authorities have no power to arrest a cyclist who is walking on the pavement guiding his machine on the road outside of the pavement.

HAROLD.—A solicitor would draw up the necessary deed for a moderate sum, the amount of which you can arrange before instructing him to proceed.

R. G.—Two pairs of unbleached socks or stockings should be worn at one time; the second sock absorbs the moisture, besides giving comfort to the wearer.

ERIC.—If she is willing to wait until you are in a position to provide her with a suitable home, then it would be wise to see her father and state your intentions.

ILL-USED WIFE.—All goods bought by the wife with money earned by herself, or bequeathed to her, are her own property, and she may dispose of them as she pleases.

ERRY 'AWKINE.—A grocer's license is one to sell drink not to be consumed on the premises; the man who gets it is supposed merely to add liquor to his ordinary stock of groceries.

A TEACHER.—The School Board in office in time a teacher resigns has full power to arrange with him the terms of his retirement, so long as these do not prejudice the teacher's rights.

PERCIVAL.—The quotation occurs in "Macbeth," Act IV., Scene 3. The correct form is—
"Things at their worst will cease or else climb upwards
To what they were before."

IONORAMUS.—Your wife can by a will give you all; similarly she can send half of what is hers to her relatives; you claim the other half in spite of any will to the contrary she may leave.

COCKNEY LAD.—When a verdict of "not proven" is returned in a Scottish Criminal Court, the accused person cannot be tried again on the same charge. The substantial effect of the verdict is therefore the same as one of "Not guilty" returned in an English court.

PHIL'S SWEETHEART.—The engagement should last long enough to enable the young man to provide his future wife with a good home and to secure for himself a position which will enable him to keep a wife, and possibly a family in comfortable circumstances.

A SERVANT LASS.—According to custom a mistress is bound to pay the fare of a girl who comes to her from a distance to act as domestic servant; she is regarded in law as putting the girl at a disadvantage by inducing her to leave a district where situations are plentiful to come to her in one where they are few.

BERTRAM.—Go into the lobby of the House, which is open to the public, and intimate to the porter at the door that you wish to see the gentleman you name; send in your card, or write name and address on a piece of paper; member will either come out or send message, telling you when he expects to be free to do so.

GERALD.—For fitting up an aquarium nothing is better than sea and oil with one-third its bulk of putty and one-sixth its bulk of fine-sifted plaster of Paris. Made the consistency of ordinary paint, this preparation is admirable for coating garden-seats and fine wood-work that is exposed to the weather.

SWEETHEARTS YET.

Twice years ago, in the month of June,
When we wandered, Kate and I,
Through that lane where the fragile wild rose blooms,
And the violets hidden lie.

We told our love in a simple way,
And pledged there our troth;
Our love was large, our fortune small,
But there was enough for both.

When sorrow came and the hour of pain,
My Kate was by my side;
As loving and true she was to me
As the day she became my bride.

Now our brows are wrinkled, our hair is white,
And the day when first we met
Is far behind in the dim, dead years,
But we are sweethearts yet.

F. R. R.

VANDA.—You might try blotting paper laid on the place, and press a hot iron on it; move the paper and always put a clean bit down, and perhaps it may draw out the grease, the clean blotting paper absorbs it; if that fails, mix a little ammonia spirits and some water together, and sponge it, the danger is to destroy the colour.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—You can get for penny stamp for each from the Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, E.W., copies of the Cape and Natal Handbooks (official) which give a fairly reliable description of the colonial industries, and you can decide for yourself that where general trade is good there will be room for you at least among others.

ANNETTE.—Bruise in a mortar two ounces of black pepper, one ounce of ginger, half an ounce of allspice, and one ounce of salt. Put the pickles in a stone jar, with a quart of vinegar, and cover them with a bladder wetted with the pickle, and over this a piece of leather. Set the jar near the fire for three days, shaking it three times a day; then pour it on the vegetables. If these directions be followed you will have gratifying results.

KATHERINE.—Eggs for the sick should be cooiled instead of boiled. Boiling renders the white of the egg tough and indigestible, even in those which are termed soft-boiled. To cooile an egg put it in a quart cup and fill nearly to the brim with boiling water. Let it stand on the back part of the stove, where it cannot even simmer, for five minutes. The white will be found a delicate jelly, and the whole perfectly wholesome and delicious.

MARJORIE.—To make cucumber toast select a nice well-grown young cucumber, pare it close, and cut into neat fillets or pieces, each about an inch and a half long. The best way is, if the cucumber is a straight, good-sized one, to cut it right down the centre and then each half right down again; then take out all the seeds carefully, and cut into short lengths. Boil the pieces thus prepared in salted water until nearly tender, but they must not be broken; take them out and lay them on a fine sieve to drain. Have ready a good white sauce, add to it a little pepper and a few drops of lemon juice, put in the pieces of cucumber, and let them simmer gently until tender and thoroughly heated. Have ready some crispy fried toast very hot; place the cucumber on it and cover with the sauce.

R. V. P.—A mixture of plaster of Paris and putty ground in oil to the consistency of thick batter is one of the very best materials for filling cracks in the outside of buildings. The plaster swells and fills out of the spaces, and the putty mixture hardens and becomes almost like stone.

TROUBLED OSCAR.—The situation is indeed a perplexing one. Why not go about in society a little, refraining from making any one girl the object of special attention, and seeking the society of married people? Have it understood that you do not think it right to marry without some definite prospect of being able to support a family. Frankly say that you would like to marry if you had means. This is the fact, and nothing becomes a young man like the truth. By this course you may be able to keep yourself free from the bonds of love until you are able to see your future clear before you.

PROSE.—Two breakfast cups of flour, one small teaspoon baking soda, three-quarters teaspoon tartaric acid, half teaspoon salt, about one breakfast cup of butter milk. Rub all the lumps out of the soda and add; then have your griddle on and warm; stir the milk in with a spoon pretty quickly till the flour is just wet; the dough should be a little soft, but not too soft to handle; have flour on the table; turn the dough out and knead it a little; divide it in two pieces; make each of them round, and roll out rather thin with plenty of flour above and below; cut each in four or eight pieces, and cook till a pale yellow colour.

KENNETH.—When James VI. of Scotland ascended the throne of England in succession to Elizabeth he became King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; thereafter none was crowned King of other Scotland or England; the title the person assumed on his or her accession at Westminster was the title by which he or she was recognised in all divisions of the kingdom; the coronation chair at Westminster contains the stone on which the Scottish monarchs were crowned; the one exception to the rule we have stated was Charles II., crowned in Scotland while a fugitive from England, and not further crowned at Westminster on the Restoration of the monarchy.

LOTHARIO.—There are four ways in which parties can marry in England; by special license, by proclamation of banns, by registrar's license, and by registrar's certificate; the first is a very costly process, permitting marriage after a day's notice, without any residential qualification; the second requires twenty-one days' residence, or seven days' notice to the clergyman, and fifteen days' previous residence; the third (registrar's license) requires that one of the parties shall have been resident for fifteen days in the parish of the registrar to whom application is made for the license, which is issued seven days afterwards; the other party must be resident in England, and parish of residence must be stated, but he or she does not require to take any action.

BERTRAM.—It is very much better to arrange with some one who has the capability to give assistance personally. In almost every community there are well-educated men and women who, for a small consideration, probably not more than the college might charge, will give worthy and ambitious young persons their personal attention and oversee their studies, set them right when they make mistakes and tell them how to prosper best in their undertakings. It requires more than ordinary application and industry to study entirely without help. Besides, an expert can tell the student what to avoid and how to take advantage of circumstances. Much valuable time may be saved in this way. All in all, an occasional tutor or adviser is well worth the money that would be required.

DONCAR.—For removing the smell of paint from rooms the simplest remedy is to be found in opening the doors and windows to let in a constant supply of fresh air until the paint has hardened. If, however, time is an object, the same result is obtained by burning a few handfuls of juniper berries on a charcoal fire in the middle of the room in precisely the same way and with the same precautions as in disinfecting with burning sulphur. The windows and doors must be stopped as closely as possible, and if the room be opened after twenty-four hours the disagreeable smell of paint will have gone, and nothing that has been left in the room will suffer injury from the fumes. Hay sprinkled with a little chloride of lime and left for an hour in the room is also an effective remedy, and if some open vessel containing water be placed in the room, after a time the water will be found covered with a film and the smell diminished.

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